

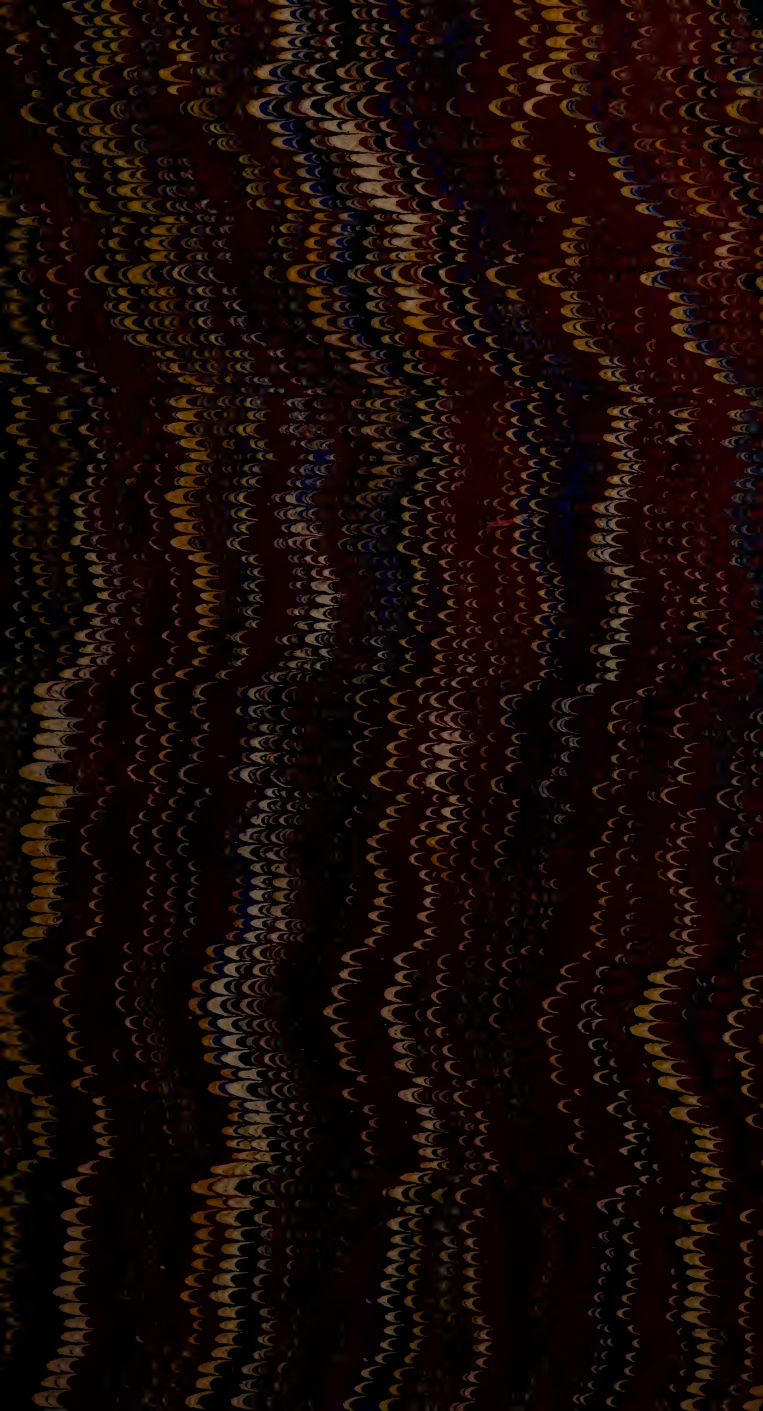
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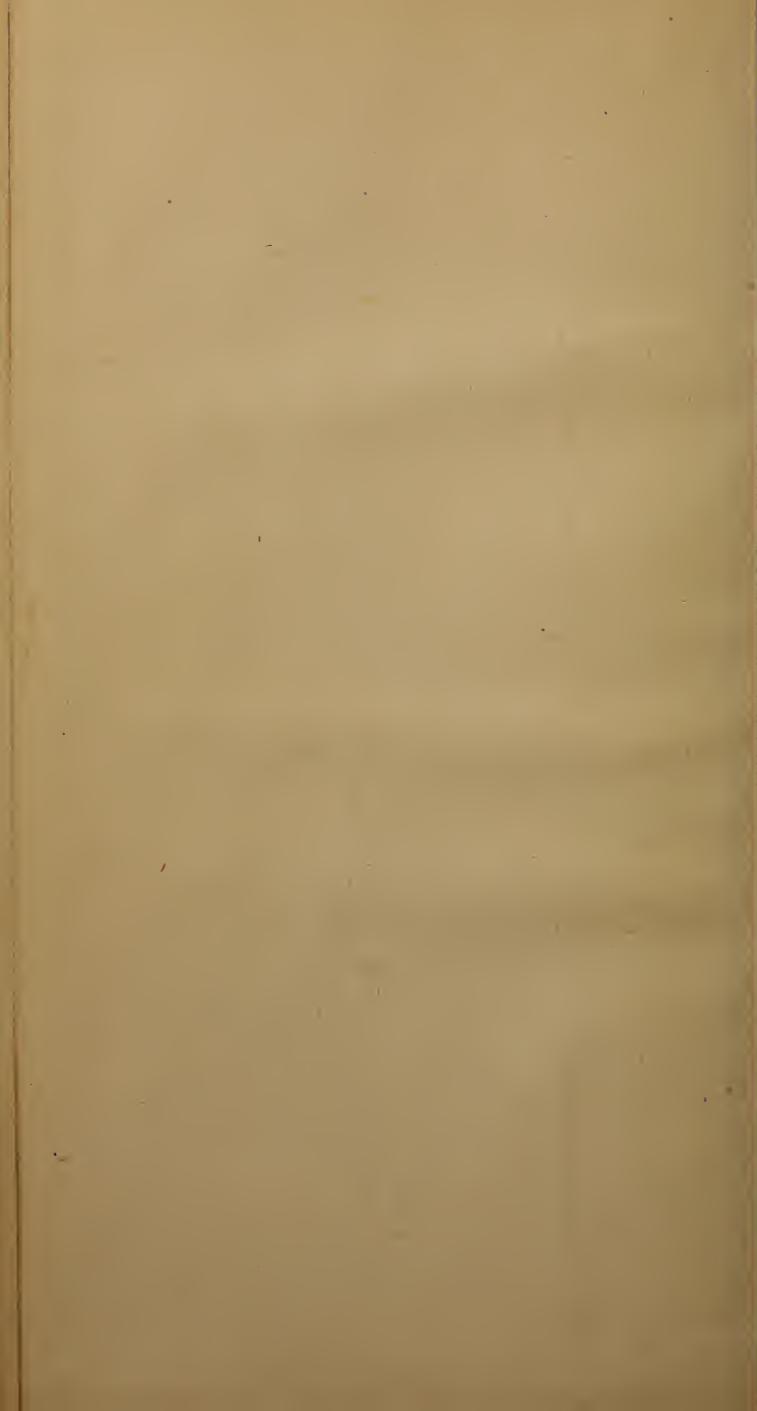
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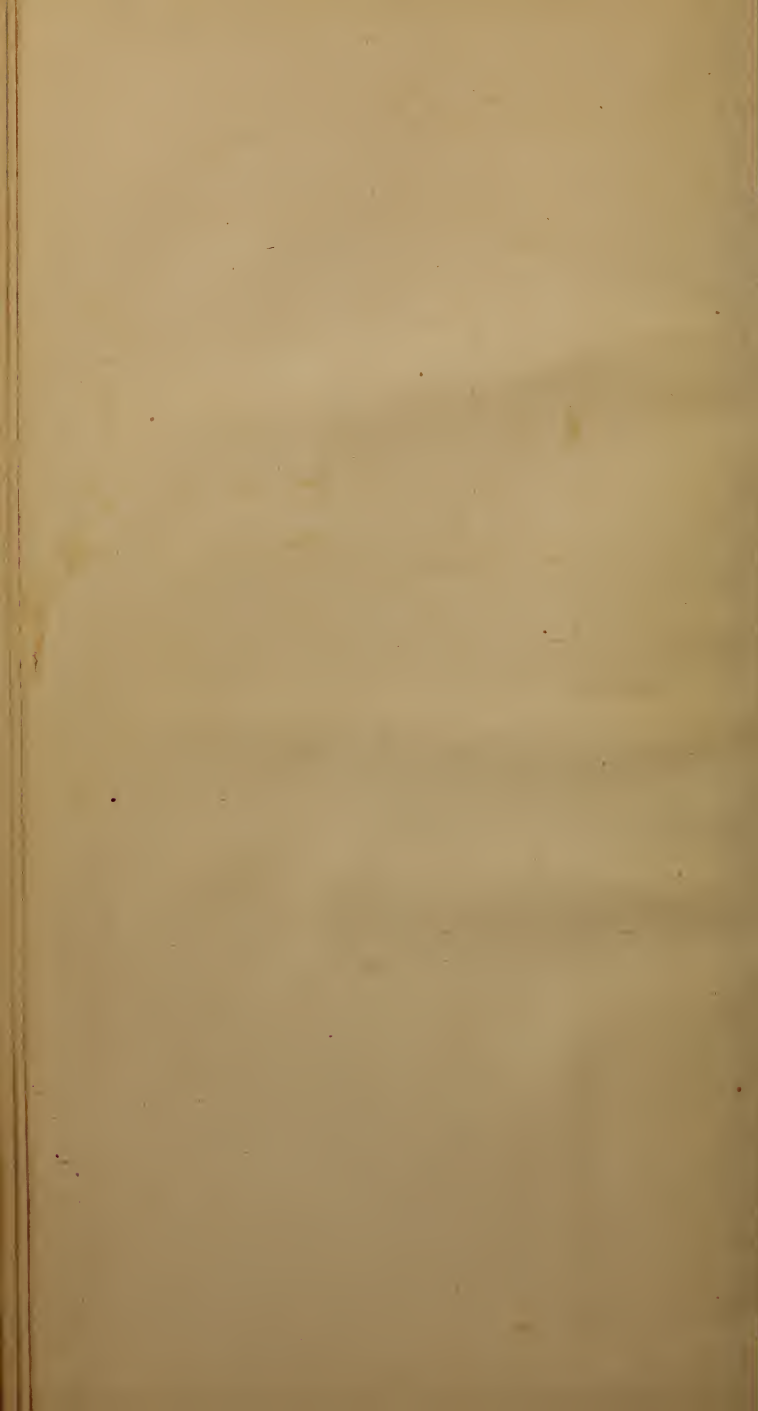
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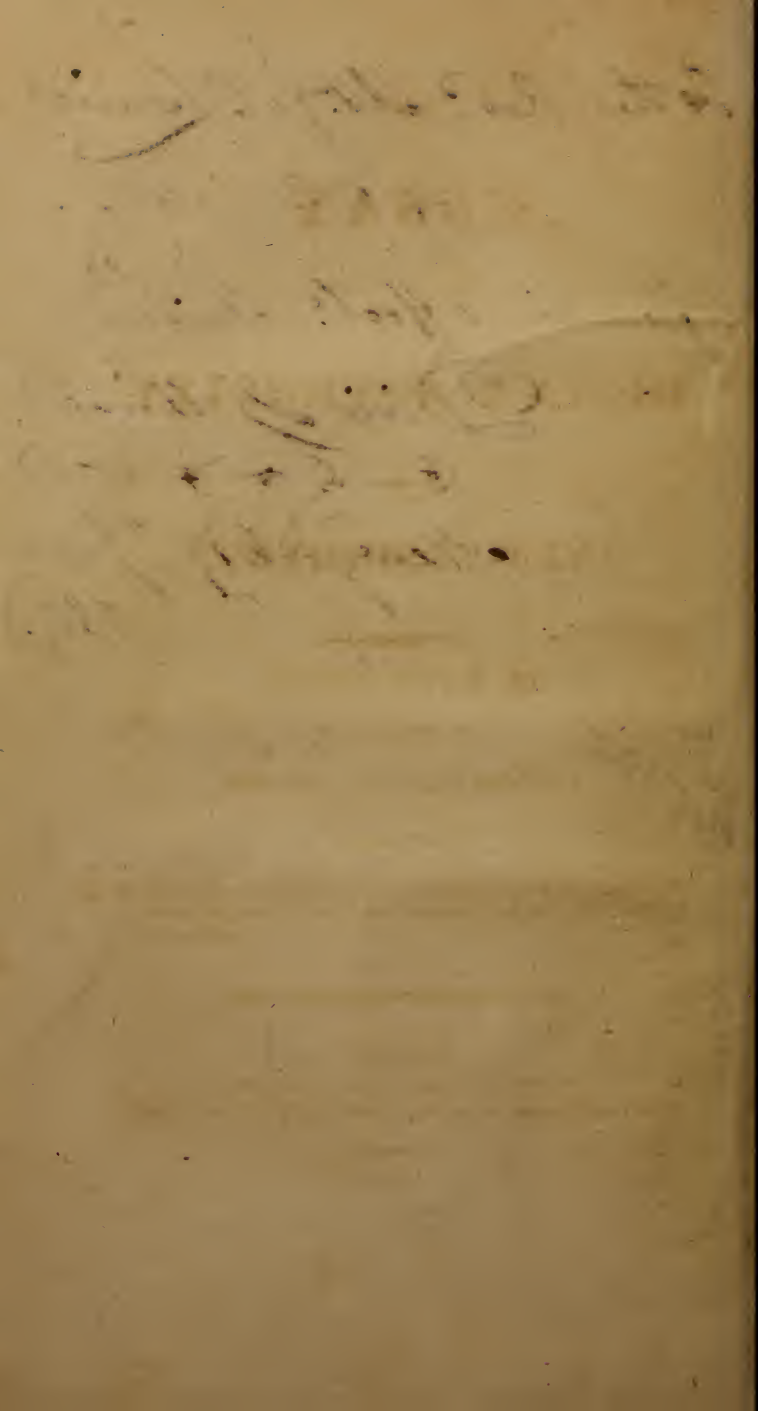
To the Rev. Mr. Jas. Laurie,
of Washington.

from his affect. Friend

David Bethune

~~Handwritten flourish~~

New York 19th June
1807.



AN
ESSAY
ON THE
DIVINE AUTHORITY
OF THE
NEW TESTAMENT.

BY DAVID BOGUE.

SECOND EDITION, REVISED.

These things are written that ye may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the
Son of God; and that believing ye may have Life through his Name.

JOHN xx. 31.

LONDON:
PRINTED BY C. WHITTINGHAM, DEAN STREET,
FOR T. WILLIAMS, STATIONERS' COURT, LUDGATE STREET.

1804.

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PREFACE.

THE following Treatise was drawn up at the request of the London Missionary Society. That zealous and active body resolved to print a very large edition of the New Testament for the use of the people of France. On considering the wide spread of infidelity in that country, it was thought it would be for their edification, to accompany it with an *Essay on the Divine Authority of the Writings of the Evangelists and Apostles*. The office was assigned to me, and it was accepted by me. The difficulty of it was felt, when it was too late to retract: and I blushed to think, that I should have dared to take up the pen on a theme, to which many of the first men in the republic of letters for talents, learning, and goodness, had bent the whole strength of their mind. However I had undertaken the task, and it was necessary to proceed. One thing gave me encouragement, as it pointed out the necessity of the work, namely, that though there were many books of the highest excellence on the evidences of the christian religion, not one was suited to our views: and a treatise more appropriate to the

particular object was needed to answer the present purpose. Such a *treatise* it has been my endeavour to furnish.

But that the reader may judge of the Essay according to the writer's design, I beg leave to lay before him the plan I pursued, as best adapted to attain the proposed object.

I have endeavoured to keep always in view the persons for whose benefit it was intended. Deists are the men addressed. Atheists I leave entirely out of the question. To propose the evidences of christianity to men who cannot read the existence of God in the works of creation, is *perdere et oleum et operam*. The deists are supposed to hold what we call *the principles of natural religion*: and if in addition to this, they be considered as in a great measure ignorant of the real doctrines of the gospel, and prejudiced against it as containing all the superstition of the church of Rome, it will finish the outlines of their character. For such I write: and it will be proper for the English reader to keep this in view.

It has been my study to select those arguments of which a person may see the force by reading the New Testament: and to it has been my constant appeal. Such proofs as required a critical skill in languages or history,

did not appear suited to the occasion. As the Essay should suit the mass, as well as men of science, what may be called *common sense* arguments, addressed to the understanding and conscience of *men* who had the New Testament in their hands, have been chiefly employed, as best adapted to general conviction.

Those who are intimately acquainted with the deistical controversy, and who need but a *hint* in order to recal a whole chain of reasoning to the mind, may complain that I have dwelt too long on each particular. Others who love to see a subject accurately treated, and arguments fully exposed to view, will find fault, because the particulars are not sufficiently illustrated. My course lay between these two. The former was altogether improper, because the persons I address are supposed to be in a great measure unacquainted with the subject. The latter would have been tedious to those for whom it is designed, and besides would have swelled the Essay into several volumes. It has been my aim to bring forward the substance of the evidence, and to illustrate each particular so far, that a person who previously had little knowledge of the subject might see and feel the force of the argument. Whether I have succeeded, it is the province of the reader to judge. If I could have spared more

room, I should have enlarged (what some may think least to the purpose) the first chapter of the Essay: because I believe that one grand reason why many reject the New Testament, is because they are ignorant of its principles, and have taken up false ideas of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

If the arrangement be perspicuous and easily remembered, it will answer the author's wish. The divisions may appear formal; but he thought they would render an Essay of this kind more distinct; and likewise that a person who would not venture on an undivided book, might be induced to read a short section, and from one be led on to another. As to language, his endeavour has been to render the ideas as plain and as obvious as he could, to minds unaccustomed to religious enquiries; and to comprise as much useful matter in as few words, as could be done without obscurity. Whether he has been able to render it interesting must be left to the judgment of others. A more adorned style might have been agreeable to many; but one man has his gift and taste in one way, and another in another.

Readers need to be reminded of this diversity of taste in composition; and that on account of it, all cannot possibly have their own gratified in any one performance. How differently do

men convey their ideas! We perceive a difference as to the matter, the form, the arrangement, the length and manner of illustration, the style and degree of decoration. Very many persons who read, but never wrote books, are not sufficiently considerate as to this point. They expect a greater conformity to their taste, than it is in the power, were it the inclination, of a writer to comply with; and if they do not find their own favourite mode of composition, they condemn the work. But a man might as well insist, that others should have the same contour of face, and eyes and hair of the same colour with his own. It should be remembered, that every man has his *manner*; and if a person write a book, provided it be composed so as to answer the purpose in a suitable degree, impartial and candid readers should allow him to do it, and indeed should expect him to do it in *his own manner*; and they have no just reason to complain on this account.

- It has been, as you will observe, my study to address deists, without bitterness and without contempt. I have made use of no harsh terms nor furious invectives, being convinced "that the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God:" but I have treated them fairly, as I wish them to treat the gospel and its advocates. A person who is conscious of truth on his side, is under no necessity of having recourse to

scurrility and abuse. Some writers on the subject have taken very high ground, and always speak of deists with the most sovereign contempt, and the most pointed virulence, as men destitute of the shadow of a pretence for their infidelity. One would imagine from their representations, that those who profess to be christians are *all angels*; and those who reject it are *all devils*. With respect to the fullness of evidence from the scriptures for the truth of christianity, we perfectly accord: but when we consider from what premises men frequently draw their conclusions, and form their judgment; and that they look at the *effects* of a religion more than at its *principles*, there is reason to lament that they have had so much to offer as an excuse for their unbelief. The superstitious worship of the church of Rome, combined with the absurdity of her peculiar tenets, and rendered more offensive by the impure or ambitious lives of many of the most dignified of her clergy, have proved a stumbling block to millions, and produced a rejection of the gospel. In protestant countries, though the creeds of the different churches be pure, have not deists had too much to alledge against the conduct of those who profess the christian religion, and still more against the worldly spirit (I speak it with grief) of too many of its ministers? What indecorous means are often publicly employed to obtain ecclesiastical pre-

ferments: and when obtained, though presenting full employment for the utmost exertions of an individual; in every lounge of idleness, in every scene of amusement, in every haunt of pleasure, are they to be daily found. What influence may such conduct be expected to have on those who witness it, and especially on those who associate with them? “These men,” they will say, “know the gospel better than we: but it is plain from their life and conversation, that they do not believe it: and why should we?” These excuses will not avail for their acquittal in the sight of God; but they should influence the defenders of christianity to treat them with less severity.

It may be said, “*they* have treated christianity in the most shameful manner.” True: but if their religion warrants them in such unbecoming dispositions of mind, let us act according to the tenor of ours, and defend the gospel *in its own spirit*. “The servant of the Lord, while he contends earnestly for the faith once delivered to the saints, must not strive, but be gentle unto all men, in meekness instructing those that oppose themselves, if God, peradventure, will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth.” Many deists, considered as members of civil society, are respectable men: let them too as immortal creatures be treated with respect. Their situation

is dangerous beyond expression ; let them be treated with the tenderest pity : they need it. Christianity loses nothing by being defended with her own weapons alone.

I am not at all astonished at the increase of infidelity : but let it ever be remembered, the causes were not of yesterday. In France, after the persecution and banishment of the protestants with a thousand circumstances of worse than *Roberts-pierrean* cruelty, and the entire destruction of their public worship, there remained nothing but the vast mass of superstition, which covers the Romish church from head to foot. Such a figure may be worshipped among a grossly ignorant people, as in Austria, and Bavaria, and Portugal, and Spain ; but knowledge was rapidly increasing in France ; and men enlightened by science could not view the tricked up harlot, but with contempt and with disgust. As the New Testament was not a book in common use as here, they fell into the same mistake with their descendants, concerning whom an author who wrote not long ago at Paris, in her description of the literary deists, says, “ It never entered into their mind to conceive that popery and christianity are two different things.” Imagining what they saw was the very religion which Jesus and his apostles published to the world, they despised it, and they rejected it. After having seen

high mass performed in all its splendour in the capital of Louis XVI, and *low mass* in various churches there; I profess that instead of wondering that multitudes of the people in that country became deists, I rather wonder that any could possibly continue to profess themselves christians, provided popery and christianity be the same.

In England the seeds of infidelity began to be sown above a century ago in the neglect of the religious instruction of young people by ministers and parents, along with the other causes which have been enumerated. The field became green: it grew slowly towards maturity, till late events, like the rains and suns which rapidly advance the harvest, made the ears of the vast field appear. Multitudes were thunder-struck, when they observed that the crop was *Infidelity*; whereas it was just as natural a produce, as if hemlock had been sown, and a field of hemlock was raised to maturity. Nothing else could reasonably have been expected.

While I am not astonished at, I am not afraid of infidelity. No fears either for the gospel, or the church of Christ disturb my mind. The church is founded on a rock, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. The gospel has stood its ground against far more formida-

which the whole may be seen to greatest advantage, so it is in such subjects as that before us. There is a *first*, which a writer will endeavour to seize, and from thence be led on to a second, and a third, so as to give to the whole the greatest degree both of clearness, interest, and force. It frequently happens that the proper beginning is not with that which is first in point of time:—in the present instance this is the case. The person who is little acquainted with, and rejects the scriptures, should begin with the New Testament, as containing the system of christianity in its full perfection. When he has read it with serious attention, let him then ascend to the writings of the Old Testament, and he will find additional confirmation of the gospel, from the preparations which, he will see, were made for the coming of Jesus Christ: the Old Testament will likewise be more easily and better understood. Whereas if a deist begin with the Old Testament, there are so many things through the whole of the volume, but especially in the Mosaic œconomy, referring to the christian dispensation, which cannot be understood, and the design of which cannot be known till he has read the New Testament, that he is in danger of growing weary of the pursuit, and giving it up in disgust. In the other way he perceives the reason of every thing as he goes along; and his task is rendered more easy and delightful. It has this

additional recommendation, that it was the method which the apostles pursued.—Should this essay be deemed to answer the purpose for which it is designed, the writer at a future time, should opportunity be given, may attempt a treatise on the Divine Authority of the Old Testament: and he conceives that there is a great variety of important considerations on the subject, to which not only deists but likewise many christians have not paid the attention which they merit.

If it be asked why an essay which was intended for France alone, is printed in the English tongue, my answer is, that the measure was approved and recommended by some gentlemen to whose judgment I pay great deference. They thought it might be useful in this country: and it was giving me an opportunity of submitting it more fully to the friends of the gospel, from whose remarks I promised myself much assistance; and hoped that I should thus be enabled to render it more fit to answer the proposed end, and less unworthy of being translated into the French tongue. On a perusal of the Essay, faults and defects are perceived in the printed copy which were not so obvious in the manuscript. Those which the writer had remarked, and such as were observed and communicated to him by others, there would be an opportunity of altering, be-

was likewise published at Paris. I am not sufficiently acquainted with that tongue to form a judgment of it; but I am informed, that to a high degree of elegance it unites the strictest fidelity.

The English edition being sold off, a second has been called for, and is now presented to the public with various corrections, which, it is hoped, will be found to be improvements. That the divine blessing may accompany it, and render it profitable to every reader, and to those especially for whose use it was designed, is the author's fervent prayer.

Le style de cet ouvrage est celui qui convient au sujet. Du naturel, de la simplicité, point de luxe, point de clinquant oratoire. Un livre de raisonnement ne doit point être écrit comme un livre d'imagination; et l'austère langage de la raison ne veut pas que la clarté soit sacrifiée aux ornemens, ni la justesse des expressions à leur enluminure.

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INTRODUCTION.

IMMORTALITY is the glory of man. Take it away, and he sinks into insignificance. They debase human nature who consider death as the close of their existence. But you shudder at the degrading thought; and, agreeably to the dictates of reason and truth, deem yourselves formed for eternity. Cherish the vast idea; and aspire after a happiness which will never end.

Will you permit a friend, though unknown, to solicit your attention to a book which was written with the godlike design of raising you to the perfection of your nature and to happiness, by conducting you to God? The book demands examination, and represents it as criminal in men, if they will not weigh its evidence and contents in the balance of impartial reason, and give it that reception to which it is entitled.

Do not turn away with disdain and say, "I will not read it." That is not the language of wisdom. The book claims its origin from God; and its object is to teach you how to serve him, and how to attain the highest felicity.—" But I

am sure it is not true." Millions have read and acknowledged its truth: among these have been the most conscientious of men, and the first luminaries of science, than whom none were ever better qualified to examine its nature and excellence: and they had no worldly interest to serve by professing to believe the gospel. When a BACON, a PASCHAL, a BOYLE, a NEWTON, a LOCKE, and a LEIBNITZ, have examined and received christianity as true, can you call yourselves impartial enquirers after truth and happiness, if you refuse to examine.

It is not desired that you should believe because they believed; but that you would *examine* what they *believed to be truth, and the most important truth*. I intreat you to read the New Testament. Till then, you cannot possibly know whether it is to be rejected or received. A cursory reading is not sufficient: it requires a repeated perusal and diligent study, that you may clearly perceive its scope, its design, its general principles, and particular truths. Without this, to call yourself either *christian* or *deist* would be alike unbecoming and unreasonable; for you are not qualified to judge of its merits, and cannot with justice either approve or condemn. Without reading and understanding the New Testament, either of the names will cover him who wears it, not with honour but with disgrace. A man of reason will examine before he decide.

Let the examination be conducted with impartiality. Christianity desires no *bias* in her favour *till* examination take place; all she requires is, (and is it not reasonable?) that no prejudice should be entertained to her disadvantage. She calls you to banish *levity* when you begin to read; to proceed with *seriousness* of mind; and to summon up all the *energies* of the soul to the work. The enquiry, she says, is of infinite importance; and your happiness in a future state depends upon the issue. Will it then be unsuitable, before you proceed, to offer up a supplication to the Father of Lights, from whom cometh down every good and perfect gift; that he would illuminate your understanding to perceive the truth; and incline your heart to embrace it, wherever it may be found?

TRUE RELIGION is the thing sought for; and it will be allowed that it ought to teach us not only what God is, but how he is to be worshipped and served; in what manner we may be admitted to enjoy his friendship; and how we may do the things which please him. A religion which does not give us information on these subjects, is entirely insufficient. That a revelation from God is *necessary* for this purpose, has been a common sentiment among mankind: and may we not consider it just? Let him who would deny it, take a view of the condition of the world, and of the history of man. What nation in a state of nature, in ancient or mo-

dern times, whether civilized or barbarous, has preserved itself from sinking into gross idolatry? Not an exception can be found, unless it be among those rude tribes which are so stupid that no traces of religion are to be discovered among them.—Wherever idolatry reigns, it is an evident proof, that men have stumbled and fallen at the very threshold of the temple; and have not advanced so far as to have a sight of the proper object of worship. Ignorance of the nature of God has been uniformly attended with ignorance of man's duty and condition, and of a future state of being; and likewise, as may naturally be expected, with the most dreadful depravity of manners, and the prevalence of every kind of vice.—Let the description of the ancient heathen world in the epistle of Paul to the Romans, the 1st chapter from the 20th verse, to the end, be compared with the most authentic documents of the state of morals among the pagan nations of antiquity, or those of modern times; and it will be found that the portrait drawn by the apostle is not overcharged in its colours, but is a perfect likeness of the original.

Were this an abstract question, an answer might be more difficult, and less satisfactory: but it is a question of fact, and the multitude of idolaters in every heathen land proclaims the necessity of a divine revelation. To alledge that SOCRATES and PLATO by the

strength of reason discovered many noble principles of religious truth, does not solve the objection*. The question is, not what a few persons of superior genius have been able to do, but to find a rule of life for the mass of mankind. That they have not been able to discover it for themselves ; or if any have discovered it, that they have not been able to render it so far of use, as to banish idolatry from a single city, (and they had hundreds and thousands of years to do it in), ancient Greece and Rome, and modern China and Hindostan afford sufficient proof. If then men are to be made wise, and good, and happy by the knowledge, and worship, and service of God, a divine revelation is absolutely necessary.

That the *possibility* of a revelation was ever called in question, may justly excite surprise. If men can convey their ideas to each other, cannot God convey his to them? If we can send a message by one man to another, or to many ; cannot God employ men as messengers in revealing his will to men?

Arguing from the nature of God, there is

* Even SOCRATES and PLATO were idolaters ; they conformed, and advised others to conform to the religion of their country—to gross idolatry and absurd superstition. One of the last acts of the former, who is accounted the wisest and best man of Pagan antiquity, was to offer a cock to ESCULAPIUS. If the wisest, and most learned were so blind, what must the foolish and the ignorant be !

likewise a *probability* of a divine revelation. His goodness and men's felicity unite in the claim. If religion be lost on earth, who can assert it to be improbable, that God will restore it? The frequent pretensions which have been made to a revelation from God, and the reception they have met with, shew that it is a sentiment congenial to the human mind.

The business then is to endeavour to find out, if God *has actually given* a revelation of his will to man; (you will perhaps add) among various pretensions, to distinguish truth from imposture. Here is a book which professes to contain what we seek for:—but you say, “Let us attend to the claims of the numerous candidates.” This, however, is no such herculean labour as you imagine. The thing which we must seek for, is an **UNIVERSAL RELIGION**, or a system which professes to be designed for the use and benefit of the whole human race: and no other will answer the purpose, whatever its merits may be. To this honour not one of the Pagan systems, either ancient or modern, prefers a claim. They allow that they are only local institutions; and some of them even refuse to admit proselytes: consequently these are all out of the question, and they cannot be heard. The Jewish religion was intended for the use of one people only, and that for a season: the religion of Jesus was the first that ever asserted the claim of *universality*;

nor has its claim been ever formally contradicted since. About six centuries after Christ, Mahomet arose. He did not deny the divine mission of Jesus of Nazareth. He spoke of him in high terms of respect : but he said his followers had corrupted the gospel ; and that he was come to restore religion to its purity by a new revelation from God. Mahomet then is the only competitor with Jesus Christ, and with how poor a title to competition will be seen in the sequel.

It is proposed to consider maturely what the gospel offers in favour of its being a revelation from God ; and your serious attention is required. After Moses and the Prophets had paved the way, in the appointed time Jesus Christ appeared ; and declared that he was sent from God to be the *saviour* of *sinners*, and the *prophet* of the human race. He called twelve men to be his disciples, to learn his doctrine from his lips, and to be witnesses of his life and death, of his resurrection and ascension. When he was about to leave the earth, he gave them a commission to go forth unto all the world, to preach the gospel unto every creature, and to convert all nations : and he promised to send his Spirit to assist them in the arduous work. They obeyed their master's voice ; and every where they proclaimed his gospel. Their zeal was great, and their success still greater.

Had the doctrine only floated in the living

voice, and rested in the memories of men, it would, most probably, have been soon corrupted or forgotten. In order to prevent this, and to preserve it in all its purity to the latest ages, it became necessary that it should be committed to *writing*. With this design they composed various treatises, containing *the life of Christ*, the history of *the planting of christianity*, letters to the societies or churches which they had formed, and a *prophetical book* in the form of an anticipated history of the christian religion, from the death of Christ to the end of the world.

These treatises were carefully collected into one volume by the disciples of a succeeding age: and that volume is called THE NEW TESTAMENT. The witnesses profess, that it comprises a full account of the christian religion in all its parts; that nothing can be added to it without a crime, by any man or body of men; and nothing taken away. They further insist, that the book was written by *divine inspiration*. God, they say, so influenced their minds and directed their thoughts, that it has neither error nor mistake. Every *historical* fact is recorded as it really was; every *doctrine* it contains, is the real doctrine of Jesus Christ; every *precept* is his command; and every *prediction* is from the Spirit of Jehovah, who suggested it to their minds. With respect to *language*, while every one followed that way of express-

ing himself which was natural to him, and which constituted his proper style; God so directed their pens, that the words they made use of, were properly fitted to convey the meaning of the Holy Spirit in his revelation of the will of God.

Along with these high pretensions, the New Testament claims to itself the *exclusive* prerogative of conducting the children of men to eternal blessedness. Such as refuse its divine authority, it charges with the heinous crime of shutting the door of mercy against themselves, and drawing down destruction upon their own heads. But those who submit to its guidance, it promises to introduce to the friendship of God, to the purity and pleasures of the christian life, and to eternal felicity in a future state. "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: but he that believeth not the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on him." John iii. 36.

Whether these claims can be substantiated or not, is the point at issue. The writer believes they can be substantiated: he, therefore, entreats the serious attention of every reader. All he asks is, that every argument may have that degree of weight given to it which it deserves. He will be permitted to add, that it is the language of a friend, who is not contending for victory, nor seeking to prop up a sys-

tem of falsehood, because by this craft he has his living ; but who writes from a disinterested love to the truth, and from an ardent desire to promote the happiness of his fellow creatures.

Before entering on the subject, it may not be improper to consider a question which has often been asked, namely, “ When God gives men a revelation of his will, what evidence may it be supposed he will give them of its truth ? ” That God could give such a *measure* of evidence to each individual, that it would be impossible for him to have a shadow of doubt upon his mind respecting it, we are absolutely certain : and many may wish that it were given. But whether God will give it or not, is a matter in which we cannot decide by reasonings *a priori* : It must be determined by facts. Were we to argue from analogy, we should say, it is most probable, that God will give evidence sufficient to convince every humble, impartial, and honest enquirer after truth ; yet not such a measure, but that proud, worldly-minded, captious men may find matter of cavilling, and reject it as an imposture. This is the case with respect to the works of creation and Providence, and to various matters of the greatest importance : and it is likely to be so here. One advantage resulting hence is, that the New Testament, as the learned GROTIUS remarks, becomes, *Tanquam lapis lydius ad*

quem hominum ingenia tententur, a touch-stone to try the hearts of men. By an overpowering evidence this advantage would be lost.

It becomes us to decide in like manner as to the *kind* of evidence which we may expect to find. Some prefer mathematical demonstration; others call for the sight of miracles: but if any one would say, "I will not believe, unless this species of evidence be given," surely nothing can be more unreasonable. All that we have a right to ask is, that the evidence be of such a kind as the subject admits, and as we are able to judge of, and in such a measure as to produce conviction: but here we are to rest. We must not presume to dictate to God: He will do what seemeth to him best; not what pleaseth us. The whole of his moral government displays this principle of conduct; and instructs us, that while he consults the good of his creatures, he will not gratify their capricious and unreasonable wishes.

It is likewise highly probable that the evidence will be *different*, both as to measure and kind, to persons living in different countries, and in different ages.—Here is a system of religion which endures for ever, offering itself, from age to age, to the acceptance of mankind. From the very nature of things, the evidence cannot be the same to the man who lived when Jesus dwelt on earth, and to him who is now invited to embrace the gospel. If, as is asserted,

christianity was ushered in by miracles, the former saw them performed; the latter receives them as a matter of testimony. There were predictions uttered at that time: the former gave credit to them on the strength of the miracles which he saw the prophet work: they are believed by the latter, on the satisfactory proof arising from their full accomplishment. There will be a difference too, as to the degree of the evidence from the capacities and dispositions of men; for it will be fullest to the most enlarged minds, and to the most holy hearts. This difference cannot possibly be prevented, but by a constant miracle extending in its operation to every individual. Not to mention that this would go far to annihilate the very existence of miracles; if we look at the ordinary course of God's moral government, we shall see, that we have no reason to expect any such thing; and that it is directly contrary to his dispensations towards the children of men. All that we have any right to expect or ask is, a sufficient degree of evidence to produce conviction in an upright heart: and here we shall not be disappointed; for there is enough for all, except those who continue under the influence of prejudices and unhallowed passions.

But let it not be conceived, for it cannot be said with any pretence to truth, that there is but scanty evidence of the divine authority of the New Testament. Men give credit to things on

which their greatest worldly interests depend, on far less evidence than this book can produce in its support. Indeed, if the evidence be maturely weighed, it will be found to be ample, and of various kinds which strengthen and support each other, suited to the nature of the subject, and sufficient to give the fullest satisfaction to every candid and serious enquirer.

CHAPTER I.

OF THE EVIDENCE FOR THE DIVINE AUTHORITY OF THE
NEW TESTAMENT, ARISING FROM THE PRINCIPLES WHICH
IT CONTAINS.

To speak of the evidences of christianity, to those who are ignorant of the nature of christianity, is almost hopeless labour; for they can but very imperfectly discern their force. Let us suppose a man to have been born in one of the houses of Herculaneum, and to have dwelt in his subterraneous mansion to the years of maturity. You wish to convince him, that there is a God; and you put into his hand, "RAY'S Wisdom of God in the Creation." I will not say that the book is in such a situation entirely destitute of weight; but I will propose another plan. First, bring him forth; and place him near the summit of Vesuvius, when all is still: let him behold the sun shining in majesty; and take a view of the surrounding country, and of the neighbouring ocean. Detain him till the day closes, and the stars bespangle the firmament; and till the moon afterwards arises in her brightness, and makes them disappear. With the morning light carry him down to the vineyards, and let him walk through the fields of corn, and feast his eyes with the varied scenes of nature. Put the book into his hands now.

Will not the arguments appear with more than tenfold force? Proceed in like manner respecting christianity; for many weighty arguments in its favour rise out of the New Testament, as those for the being of a God rise out of the works of creation.

To the New Testament, every one who would know what the christian religion is, and who would enquire after truth with any hope of success, is earnestly intreated to resort. The particulars here detailed will enable you to form some idea of the leading principles of the gospel; and, at the same time, will be sufficient to convince you, that *the New Testament* is no common book. This some, especially of late, have endeavoured to represent it; and too many, without reading, have been induced to believe it to be a weak, ridiculous compilation. But peruse the following sections; and *I have no doubt*, but every impartial mind will be obliged to confess, that the New Testament is the most extraordinary performance which the world has ever seen.

SECTION I.

The Character of God as delineated in the New Testament.

CONSISTENCY is a quality which it is not easy for a writer to support, in the persons introduced into his book. The higher the character,

the more difficult is it to keep up the dignity which belongs to it. When God is introduced, the difficulty rises to its highest pitch. Man may speak of man, as to the general principles of his nature, in a tolerably accurate way; but for man to speak of God, and to represent him in his nature and government, in such a manner that nothing shall fall beneath the dignity of a being infinitely perfect, is an arduous task indeed. But the writers of the New Testament undertake it. Their volume may be called the book of God. He is introduced at the very beginning; and he continues to the end. He appears in every page, nay almost in every sentence. There is a description of his various attributes; and we see him always clothed with power, wisdom, sanctity, rectitude, and goodness. He is held up to view as the creator and governor of the universe; and as the saviour of sinful men. He speaks; he acts: we are told what he has said; and what he has done. His extraordinary interposition for the redemption of the human race, is delineated at full length; and we are instructed what he will do, till the end of the world, and through all eternity.

I sit down and enquire how the men of Galilee succeed in their hazardous attempt. To my astonishment I find nothing which it is beneath God to say or do. Some things are above my comprehension; and I do not wonder, for he is God and not man. But there is nothing level

to my capacity, concerning which I can say, "It is unbecoming God to have spoken or acted thus." On the contrary, every thing appears worthy of God. His plans, so far as I can understand them, are infinitely excellent. He is ever pursuing the general welfare in the highest degree; he is bringing good out of evil; and actually advancing the happiness of all who love and serve him. Did it not lead me into too large a field, I would extend the description to the Old Testament, the first volume of this book.

I am at no loss to account for this, because I believe the writers of the New Testament were inspired. But how will you, who reject christianity, account for it? Whence did these illiterate men acquire so just and exalted ideas of the Supreme Being?

But the argument is not presented in all its extent of evidence, till we compare the New Testament with the writings of other men. The compositions of the poets of Greece and Rome have been celebrated throughout the world. You admire them. Let us take a view of the deities which these men, the theologians of the ancient pagans, have described.—But their lusts, their quarrels, their revenge, their temper, and their conduct, are so disgusting, that the mind cannot bear to institute a comparison. How high do the Philosophers of the same

countries stand in the annals of fame! But when we hear some of them denying that there is a God, and see others excluding him from the government of the world; and among the best of them, for one just sentiment of God, ten that are absurd:—if we find more decent company, it is but little more instructive. It is equally needless to stop with the votaries of Bramha and Buddha in the east: they discover a similar taste, and present us with similar descriptions of the object of their worship. Mahomet, it has been observed, is a peculiar favourite with the opposers of christianity. Let us attend to his representation of God: only be it remembered that he had the Old and New Testament to copy from: but he could not copy. His features of deity are harsh and forbidding. Some of the divine perfections are left out: his God is imperfect. The men of Judea and Galilee alone could delineate the character of God. They have done it so well, that in the most polished countries at the present time, none can say, “You have forgotten an attribute: we can improve the description.” —Were they not taught of God?

SECTION II.

The Character of Jesus Christ.

WERE there nothing else to distinguish the New Testament from other books, this alone would establish its superiority. That it is a *real character* which is drawn, and not a fiction, is evident from the very representation. No human mind would ever have conceived such an one. We find nothing like it in any ancient writings: PLATO and ARISTOTLE had no such conceptions. Such a birth, such a life, such a death, lie beyond the bounds of human invention; for human invention is limited and regulated by human passions and pursuits. There is a peculiar symmetry of features, a certain original and appropriate cast of countenance, which proves the portrait to be drawn from a real person; and not to be a fancy piece, which sprang out of the imagination of the painter. This is eminently the case in the life of Christ. The discerning reader will perceive it to be no romance, no effort of genius, to pourtray a remarkable character which never had existence; but a real personage who lived on earth, and did, and suffered, and spoke, and acted, what is related of him. If in any instance human sagacity can discriminate between real life and fiction, it is here; for a thousand

circumstances are adduced, which furnish the fullest opportunities of distinguishing the one from the other. The heated imagination of a writer may fancy that his hero acts naturally and according to character in the various situations in which he places him; and those likewise with whom he has intercourse. But one reader, more conversant with a peculiar walk in life, sees one thing to be unnatural, and another, another: and thus the romance is discovered. But in the life of Christ no such unsuitableness appears: all is in its proper place. Were the men of Galilee such proficient in deception? No. The conclusion is obvious:—They write a true history.

The *perfection* of Christ's character is another consideration which stamps a peculiar excellence on the New Testament. A representation is given of one entirely free from every error and every sin,—of one who is perfectly wise and perfectly good. This character is not portrayed in a few brilliant passages at the end of the gospels: it rises out of the whole of the history of his life and death. Jesus is presented in many, and in different situations. He is introduced speaking on an infinite variety of subjects; he converses familiarly with his friends; he discourses to the multitude; he replies to the cavils of his enemies. He is displayed both in active employments and in sufferings: but not one word is contrary to the dictates of wis-

dom; not one action contrary to the rules of rectitude. He is often thrown into the most trying circumstances; and sudden and ensnaring questions are frequently put to him: but his consummate prudence shines forth in his answers, and in his conduct; and none can accuse him of folly or of sin. In his most bitter sufferings, from the hands of his Father, and of the Jews, there is neither murmuring against God, nor hatred and revenge, nor reviling of man.—But he does not rest in negative virtue: he is all resignation to the will of God. His treatment of Judas, when betrayed, and about to be delivered up; his behaviour before Pilate; his words to the daughters of Jerusalem, when they wept at his sufferings; and his prayer on the cross for his enemies, all manifest the highest and purest efforts of goodness. Not one evil passion shews itself in the slightest degree; even in an unbecoming word. No ignorance, no error, no imprudence; all is truth, and all is wisdom. Enthusiasm and superstition have no place in this wondrous personage. There is from first to last a full display of perfect rectitude and perfect goodness.

In persons of remarkable activity, who are constantly engaged in one duty or another, and who are thereby thrown into situations of difficulty and temptation, how hard is it to keep free from blame! Something is hastily said;

something is unwisely done: a reproof is given without due consideration; a reply is too bitter. Into the few years of the ministry of Christ is compressed a greater portion of good works, and active services, than can be found in the protracted life of the man who dies at three-score years and ten; and who has served God from his youth. But no imperfection is to be found: "Which of you," said he, to his bitterest enemies, and he says it to you, "which of you convicteth me of sin?" Examine the life of Jesus fully and maturely. It is written by four men: and I venture to say with confidence, you will find nothing which can detract from the perfection of his character. No other book furnishes a like instance.—A few pages of panegyric may be written without a fault. A life of tranquil inactivity it may be possible to represent without many prominent blemishes: but a life of so much business as the New Testament exhibits in Jesus Christ, does not exist: and it increases a thousand fold the difficulty of drawing a perfect character. Yet they succeeded. No men of ancient or modern times can furnish such an example. Take a view of the writers, their education, their manner of life, their social intercourse and relations; and you may justly exclaim with astonishment: "How were these men alone able to do what all others, in ancient or modern times, who

“ attempted it, have attempted in vain !” I can think of no other answer but this ;—
 “ They were taught of God.”

But there is something still remaining to be mentioned in the character of Christ, which is equally, if not more extraordinary. While the Evangelists uniformly represent him as a partaker of human nature, they also speak of him as being *more than man* : for he is not only called, the Son of Man, but, *the Son of God*. Here then is an additional difficulty in delineating the character of Jesus. There must be added, to the perfection of a man, the elevation becoming “ the Word, who was in the beginning with God, and who was God, by whom all things were made :” nor do we search for it in vain. Along with the most amiable condescension that ever adorned human nature, there is united an uniform dignity of sentiment and conduct becoming his exalted rank, as the Son of God. Jesus speaks with authority ; he promises with a consciousness of his power ; he confers blessings as one who has a right to bestow. In every thing, and place, and time, he preserves, without the remotest semblance of pride or assuming arrogance, the tone of a master, and the dignified deportment of one who “ came down from heaven to give life unto the world ; and who was the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.”

There is another thing respecting Jesus Christ

which deserves to be thrown into the balance ; and it is by no means destitute of weight : namely, that the Evangelists do not present a *popular* character. There is nothing of the air of an impostor in it : it was not calculated to gain the approbation of the Jews. They expected a Messiah who would lead them on to victory, who would subdue all their foes, and who would exalt them to worldly dignities. Their hopes of these things were high and warm, and of long continuance : They had drunk them in with their mother's milk : they had received them by tradition from their fathers. Those who wished to impose on them and gain their favour, flattered their prejudices, and promised them worldly greatness. Thus did the false Messiahs act. We see them at the head of armies, endeavouring to gain glory to the Jewish nation, by the edge of the sword. But Jesus of Nazareth comes in a way which was altogether unexpected ; in a way which dashed all their hopes, and robbed their minds of those golden dreams which had so long delighted them. In short, it was a total disappointment in a matter which was the sheet-anchor of their hopes, and which occupied their whole souls. But there is even more than a disappointment : Jesus enjoins an opposite temper, on the subjects of his kingdom ; and he enforces it by his own example. Instead of cherishing their fond expectations, that he

would erect his standard, and lead him forth to victory and glory, he speaks “ of the Son of “ Man being betrayed into the hands of sinners, “ who would scourge him, and spit upon him, “ and put him to death.” Nay, more, instead of encouraging their ideas of superiority to the Gentiles, he utters various parables to convey the unwelcome, because humbling idea, that the Gentiles were to be admitted to a participation of the same privileges with the Jews; and that men of all nations, who received the gospel, were to be melted down into one holy brotherhood. Is this the conduct of an impostor? Can either the person described, or the writers, excite suspicions of an intention to deceive *?

* Instead of soliciting permission, I shall be entitled to thanks for inserting here the no less just than eloquent, the inimitable description of the character of Christ, drawn by the hand of a master.

“ I will confess to you that the majesty of the scriptures strikes me with admiration, as the purity of the gospel hath its influence on my heart. Peruse the works of our philosophers, with all their pomp of diction: how mean, how contemptible are they compared with the scripture! Is it possible that a book, at once so simple and sublime, should be merely the work of man? Is it possible that the sacred personage, whose history it contains, should be himself a mere man? Do we find that he assumed the tone of an enthusiast or ambitious sectary? What sweetness, what purity in his manners! What an affecting gracefulness in

The *manner* in which the disciples narrate the life of Christ, is likewise uncommon and wor-

his delivery! What sublimity in his maxims! What profound wisdom in his discourses! What presence of mind in his replies! How great the command over his passions! Where is the man, where the philosopher, who could so live and so die, without weakness, and without ostentation?—When Plato described his imaginary good man with all the shame of guilt, yet meriting the highest rewards of virtue, he describes exactly the character of Jesus Christ: the resemblance was so striking that all the christian fathers perceived it.

“What prepossession, what blindness must it be to compare (Socrates) the son of Sophronicus to (Jesus) the Son of Mary! What an infinite disproportion is there between them! Socrates, dying without pains or ignominy, easily supported his character to the last; and if his death, however easy, had not crowned his life, it might have been doubted whether Socrates, with all his wisdom, was any thing more than a vain sophist. He invented, it is said, the theory of morals. Others, however, had before put them in practice; he had only to say, therefore, what they had done, and to reduce their examples to precept.—But where could Jesus learn among his competitors, that pure and sublime morality, of which he only hath given us both precept and example?—The death of Socrates, peaceably philosophizing with his friends, appears the most agreeable that could be wished for; that of Jesus, expiring in the midst of agonizing pains, abused, insulted, and accused by a whole nation, is the most horrible that could be feared. Socrates, in receiving the cup of poison, blessed the weeping executioner who administered it; but Jesus, in the midst of excruciating tortures, prayed for his merciless tormentors. Yes! if the life and death of Socrates were those of a sage, the life and death of Jesus were those of

thy of peculiar notice. There is something here perfectly *unique*: the whole compass of human literature furnishes nothing similar. That the men who wrote the gospels loved their master, is too plain to be denied. Their renunciation of every worldly advantage and prospect, their entire devotedness to his cause, their multiplied and bitter sufferings for his sake, all display both the sincerity and fervour of their love.—In what raptures will they describe his life and death! But on examination we find no such thing. The writers of the epistles speak in ecstacy of his excellence and love: The prophets do so too. Isaiah, especially, has all the impassioned expressions of a

a God. Shall we suppose the evangelic history a mere fiction? Indeed, my friend, it bears not the marks of fiction; on the contrary, the history of Socrates, which nobody presumes to doubt, is not so well attested as that of Jesus Christ. Such a supposition, in fact, only shifts the difficulty, without obviating it: it is more inconceivable, that a number of persons should agree to write such a history, than that one only should furnish the subject of it. The Jewish authors were incapable of the diction, and strangers to the morality contained in the gospel, the marks of whose truth are so striking and inimitable, that the inventor would be a more astonishing character than the hero."

What a mind! to conceive ideas so beautiful and so just! The divinity of the New Testament is displayed as with a sun beam! But what a heart! to resist the force of all this evidence, to blind so fine an understanding, and to be able to subjoin, "I cannot believe the Gospel!"

deeply affected spectator of his crucifixion. But the evangelists are perfect calmness: human fervour will call it indifference. There is no attempt to move the passions of their readers: they mix not their own feelings with what they narrate. There is not a single commendation of Christ, in the form of a panegyric, through the whole of the gospels. They describe his miracles and wondrous works without praise; and in a tranquillity of manner which seems at first sight unaccountable. There is not the most distant attempt to magnify them, and excite admiration. Nay, when they describe his sufferings and death, and the cruelty of the Jews, they do not give way to passion and grief: there is no invective against his enemies; no pity expressed for the sufferer; no acrimony against Judas or the chief priests. They relate all as if they had no concern in the matter.—When XENOPHON describes the death of SOCRATES, we observe nature expressing her feelings in sympathy with the sufferer, in commendation of his virtues, and in crimination of his enemies. Why do we not meet with the same thing in the biographers of Jesus? This is the more remarkable, as they were not men who had been taught to disguise their feelings.—They must certainly have been under a superior guidance.

SECTION III.

The Delineation of Human Nature.

THIS is a subject concerning which we may, in a revelation from God, expect very particular information; nor shall we be disappointed. The heart of man has been the study of the most eminent philosophers: and to explore the springs of action, and trace its operations, has been deemed one of the most useful employments. But where shall we find so just and so full a view of human nature as in the New Testament? The heart is anatomized; and every part, to its inmost recesses, is presented before our eyes. The various disorders in the understanding, the will, and the affections, which constitute *human depravity*, are accurately delineated. The numerous deceptions to which men are liable, both from the workings of their own hearts, and likewise from the operation of external causes, are here unmasked. The principles which influence the conduct of men are described both in a didactic, and historical way: and by looking into our own breasts, we perceive the description to be just. The account given of what passes in the hearts of wicked men is so accurate, that when their motives of action, their restraints,

their fears, their remorse, their desires, and their pursuits, have been delineated from the New Testament, they have been ready to consider themselves as pointed at by the preacher. Good men are described in it; their dispositions, their aims, their temptations, their difficulties, their hopes, their distresses, their consolations; and all with such perfect exactness, that they are sensible the book could be written by the searcher of hearts alone. It enters likewise into every walk of relative life: it sets before us, the rich and the poor, the young and the old, man in prosperity and in adversity, in life and at death; and gives a well-drawn picture of each.

In addition to these, while this wonderful book represents the distresses, the guilty fears, and the wants of men, it unveils the gospel, as the grand remedy, which divine wisdom and mercy have provided. It describes the effect which the gospel has upon the heart, in delivering it from these evils, and in producing faith, sanctity, and happiness. A great variety of different tempers and situations of the heart is exhibited; and the influence of the gospel in them clearly shewn. The christian feels from experience, and remarks from observation, that the description is perfectly and entirely just: and he finds here an argument for the divine authority of the book, which he cannot resist.

When I sit down, and reason on the matter, I am filled with admiration and astonishment. The writers of this book were most of them fishermen of Galilee: and all the earlier part of their days was spent in following their laborious employments,—not in the study of human nature. But they all shew the same accurate knowledge of man; and their system is the same.—This remark might very properly be extended to the Old Testament. Besides they were Jews, separated from the rest of mankind, and but little acquainted with them: but they describe men of all nations, and of all ages. The book suits *us* just as well as it did those who lived in their own days. For profoundness of remark, for justness of description, for extent of view, none of the writings of the ancient philosophers are to be compared to this volume. But whence comes the superiority of these unlettered men? Let the deist account for it, if he can.

SECTION IV.

*The Doctrine of a Mediator, and Redemption
through Him.*

THAT man should love God with all his heart, and his neighbour as himself, is not the language of religion only; it is likewise the dic-

tate of reason. But, alas ! neither reason nor religion have had sufficient influence to produce this effect. Man has offended God, and guilt has exposed him to punishment ; for the holiness of God must hate sin, and his justice lead him to testify in his conduct the displeasure which his heart feels. That man is also a depraved creature, and manifests that depravity in his sentiments and disposition, the whole history of the human kind furnishes abundant proof. If the annals of the different nations of the earth do not pourtray the tempers and actions of a race of dreadfully depraved creatures, there is no such thing in nature as an *argument*. The tendency of guilt and depravity is as naturally and certainly to misery, as of a stone to fall downwards.

In what way *guilty* and *depraved* creatures can be delivered from wickedness and punishment, and restored to goodness and felicity, is one of the most difficult, as it is one of the most important questions, which can employ the mind. God is justly displeased : how shall he be reconciled ? Guilt makes man afraid of God : how shall the cause of fear be removed ? Depravity makes man averse to intercourse with God : how shall his sentiments and disposition be changed ? These are all difficulties which natural religion cannot resolve ; and reason is utterly silent.

Repentance and *reformation* have been consi-

dered by many as fully sufficient to banish all these evils; but they have no countenance for their opinion from the course of God's moral government. A *debauchee* repents bitterly and sincerely of his vicious excesses; but repentance does not heal his diseased body: "he is made to possess the sins of his youth;" and the fatal effects of his vices bring him to an early grave. The *gamester* repents of his folly, and reforms his conduct; but his penitence and reformation do not procure the restoration of his lost estate: and he spends his remaining years in poverty and want. By imitating, men testify their approbation of the divine conduct, in their ideas of distributive justice. The *murderer* is seized, and led to the tribunal of the judge. He professes to be a penitent, and there is no reason to question his sincerity. But do any think that his repentance should arrest the arm of the righteous law? He is condemned, and suffers death. If then the sentiments of men, confirming the conduct of God, proclaim the insufficiency of repentance to atone for iniquity, no rational hope can be entertained of its efficacy. We must look to another quarter: but where shall we look?

An extraordinary interposition of the Supreme Being appears necessary: and a revelation of his will to give us information on the subject. Though it would be presumption in us to name every thing that a revelation will

contain, we may say with confidence, it will be full and explicit as to the pardon of sin, and the method of a sinner's reconciliation with God. These are indispensibly requisite. The New Testament does not disappoint our wishes nor our hopes: it enters fully into all these difficulties, and proposes a remedy for every evil which we feel. *The doctrines of a Mediator, and redemption through him*, present themselves to our eyes in every page; and form the very core of the christian religion.

The mediator is JESUS CHRIST. The dignity of his *person*, the apostles are at a loss for words to describe. "He is the brightness of the Father's glory, and the express image of his person. Heb. i. 3. "He was in the form of God, and thought it not robbery to be equal with God." Phil. ii. 6. "But because the children were partakers of flesh and blood, he himself also took part of the same." Heb. ii. 14. His office is described in all its parts. He appears as a Prophet, Priest, and King: and we are taught, that on account of the obedience unto death of the mediator, who now in heaven maketh intercession for us, God may be just, and the justifier of him that believeth in Jesus: that through faith in his name, pardon of sin is to be obtained, reconciliation with God, and the enjoyment of his friendship: and that in consequence of the appearance of Jesus Christ, and of his mediatorial acts, the Holy

Spirit is sent down to earth, to remove human depravity ; and, by enlightening the minds and sanctifying the souls of men, to make them meet for that state of perfect and eternal blessedness which is promised in the gospel.

As the whole of the doctrine of a mediator is matter of pure revelation, it is far more difficult for us to pass a judgment concerning the necessity, wisdom, and fitness of the whole, or of some of its parts, than in the principles of natural religion. Various points on which the doctrine depends, and with which it is connected, as for example, “ the evil and the effects of sin ; the injury it does in the universe ; what is necessary in order to forgiveness, consistently with the holiness and rectitude of the divine nature, and the honour of the divine government ; and the example or warning necessary to be given to all intelligent beings,”—These are things in which God alone is competent to judge. No man is qualified to decide on these high themes, further than God directs him by the light of revelation. In various parts and bearings, the doctrine is above our comprehension ; but in none is it contrary to our reason. *This* would involve it in certain condemnation, but *that* does not. Though in many particulars, we cannot understand how it is brought about, yet we clearly perceive that according to the New Testament, many of the important de-

signs of the Supreme Ruler are accomplished by it. If the means be extraordinary, so is the end: and if the Mediator be a great and glorious person, his interposition brings about the highest, the most benevolent, extensive, and lasting effects, in the government of the universe. There may be other ends answered by it, of which we are ignorant; some, perhaps, with which man has as yet no immediate concern, and others of which we cannot see the reason in a present state, and which it was therefore unnecessary for God to make known to us now.

It must be allowed to be in favour of this doctrine, that it is agreeable to the *analogy* both of the natural and the moral world. In how many instances, is one person made the instrument of good to another: and benefits which we could not acquire for ourselves, are acquired for us, and bestowed on us by the interposition of others. If, therefore, the book which contains such a doctrine, have sufficient evidence, that it is from God, this can be no solid argument against it.

It is worthy of particular remark, that the doctrine of a mediator gives a *peculiarity* to the gospel, which distinguishes it from every system originating in man. The ancient pagan religions, as retaining some traces of the original revelation, had a faint shadow of it. The Jewish dispensation held it up continually to

view ; and its extensive ritual was little else than a multiform type of a mediator and redemption through him, in various parts and effects. But when men wished to frame a system for themselves, by mending an old religion, or inventing a new one, they could not perceive the necessity and utility of the doctrine. Mahomet's understanding could not reach so high : and one of the things which he left untouched in the New Testament, while he purloined from other parts of it, was *redemption by a mediator*. How ill the tenets which he put in its place, are adapted to bear the weight laid upon them, every enlightened reader of the Koran will easily discern. The want renders the Mahometan a very gloomy system, void of the cheerful light of the gospel ; as it must leave the anxious mind of the devout mussulman always in doubt, whether his quantity of penitence, of prayers, of fasting, of alms-deeds, and of pilgrimage, be sufficient to cancel his guilt, and open to him the gates of paradise. The ancient philosophers, many of whom wished to have the credit of a new system of religion, do not appear to have discovered the necessity of a mediator. Nor have the modern deists, though their natural religion be stolen from the New Testament, felt the necessity of redemption, or transferred any part of it into their writings. That man's sins must be pardoned, and that he must be reconciled to God, and

made good, before he can be happy, the most rational deists grant. But the means of accomplishing these in a way honourable to God, and safe to men ; in a way that furnishes powerful encouragement, and lays a firm foundation for lively hope, they have left out ; because they have left out a mediator. Will not distracting uncertainties, and perplexing doubts and fears be the certain consequence, with every serious man of that persuasion ?

Whence had the Apostles their knowledge ? They have given us a full view of human nature ; and have exposed in the clearest light the depravity, guilt, and misery of man. They have, at the same time, pointed out a method of deliverance from all these evils. Their system is wonderfully ingenious : it is original : it is adapted to the condition of human nature : it is a remedy perfect and complete. They say they had all their knowledge of religion from Jesus Christ. But whence did Jesus Christ derive it ? Those who deny his divine mission, will find it difficult to account for his knowledge. There is something in his scheme unspeakably superior to every other. It takes in the rights of God, as well as the necessities of man ; and renders God glorious in all his perfections, as well as man completely happy. Who besides, in ancient or modern times, ever conceived so vast an idea ? But Jesus had no literary education. Perhaps the Old Testa-

ment was the only book he ever read. He never associated with the philosophers: his companions were not the chief priests, and elders, and scribes.—Let the deist sit down and assign a satisfactory reason for the vast superiority of the gospel. The christian is free from difficulty; for he reads in the sacred page, and he believes that “Jesus Christ is the only begotten Son, who was in the bosom of the Father, and hath declared him unto us.” John i. 18.

SECTION V.

The moral Precepts of the Gospel.

By those who have been accustomed from their childhood to the reading of the New Testament, so that every part of it is familiar to their minds, it is scarcely possible to form an idea of the difficulty of ascertaining the various relations among mankind with such precision, as to delineate exactly what is due to each. The writings of the evangelists and apostles have shed so clear a light on the subject, that some are apt to consider the knowledge of relative duties, (which all the inhabitants of christendom have through various channels derived from them) as originating in the reflections of their own minds, and as the spon-

taneous growth of the human heart, without labour and without cultivation. But read the *institutes of* MENU, or peruse the books of the ancient sages of pagan antiquity in the west; and the fallacy will soon be detected. That some things there, are good and well said, must be obvious to all. But how defective are they in many points, and how unjust in others, how superstitious in more! Some duties are mis-stated; some are mutilated; some are entirely omitted; and many things are strenuously enjoined as duties, which are not. Their *code* of morals, even in what is due from man to man, wants many *leaves*. As to the most important part of the system, namely, man's obligation to *God*, and the duties resulting thence, there is a still more dreadful deficiency. Instead of moral duties, we find little else but a hideous mass of superstitious rites, and unmeaning ceremonies.

In the New Testament there is a perfect system of moral precepts. What is due from man to himself, is delineated without defect, and without redundancy. What he owes to his fellow creatures in all their different relations, is clearly defined, and authoritatively enjoined. None can say, "It is unjust to require me to act thus to my father, to my master, to my servant, to my child." Man's duty to God, (a subject still more difficult, and where heathens failed the most), is laid down

with equal clearness, and equal fulness. Nothing can be conceived to be a duty, which is not here enjoined; nor any thing enjoined as a duty, which we can say is unreasonable and ought not to be performed. The world may be challenged to mention one duty to God, or man, which the New Testament does not enjoin; or to prove any one thing it enjoins as a duty, to be destitute of reason, and void of obligation. The simplicity, the conciseness, the perspicuity, and the authority with which they are delivered, give force to truth, and scope to reason in the application of general duties to particular circumstances.

The morality of the writers of the New Testament is their own. They borrowed it from none. It begins at the source, and gives laws to the *thoughts*. Its precepts reach to the first workings of the heart: it enjoins purity of soul, and brings "into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ," 2 Cor. x. 5. Not a vain imagination can be indulged, not an unhallowed desire rise up, without polluting the soul, and contracting guilt.

How different is this system from what was written and taught by the sages of Greece and Rome. Regard for a person's own fame and reputation, how exalted a place does it occupy among Pagan moralists! and an equal anxiety is discovered for the good opinion of others,

and the approbation of the public. The following line of one of their poets expresses both :

“ Est pulchrum digito monstrari, et dicier, *Hic est.*”

While they thought it a fine thing to be pointed at with the finger, and have it said, *That is he*, the Pharisees were practising similar morals. Their desire was to “ be seen of men, and “ they loved the praise of man more than the “ praise of God.” These the Gospel utterly excludes : it authoritatively inculcates self-denial on all its votaries. It enjoins a supreme regard to what God approves ; but to man, no farther than their approbation accords with God’s, and is founded upon it. The disciples of Jesus are commanded to make their light shine before men : but the aim must be, not that they may be admired and praised ; but that those who see their good works, may “ glorify their “ Father who is in Heaven.”

The morality of the gospel is uncontaminated with the impure mixtures which have defiled every human system, published before or since. It admits no *licentiousness* ; it enjoins no *austerities* ; it contains no *superstition* ; it will be satisfied with no *partial regard*. In the religion of Heathens and Mahometans, how many licentious practices are tolerated and approved ! not one will the gospel allow, even in thought. What a multitude of superstitious observances

do we perceive in every Heathen code, in the Koran, and in the Talmud, which is the bible of the latter Jews. But let the bitterest enemy of Christ, who is best versed in the New Testament, take up the book; and point out one. Austerities, or practices consisting in a privation of comfort, how congenial have they always been to human nature; and how exalted a niche have they occupied in the religions of men in ancient days, and at the present hour, among Pagans, Mahometans, Jews, and even among some who have assumed the christian name! But where will a sanction for austerities be found in the gospel? Never is the idea even hinted at, that such things render a man more acceptable to God, or advance him to a state of higher perfection. In perusing histories of religion, how often do we find reason to remark, that ritual observances have been made to supply the place of moral duties; and even zeal for, and abundance in one duty, to compensate for the neglect of another. But no partial regards will the gospel allow; it insists on universal obedience, and loudly declares "that he who offends in one point is guilty of all."

How the writers of this book should be able to draw up a system of morals, which the world after the lapse of eighteen centuries cannot improve, while it perceives numberless faults, and suggests numberless corrections in those of the philosophers of India, Greece, and Rome, the

deist is concerned to account for, in a rational way. The christian is able to do it with ease: The evangelists, and the apostles of Christ “spake, as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.”

SECTION VI.

The manner in which a future State is represented in the New Testament.

WHEN an author chooses a theme which is level to the human capacity, and of which all can judge from observation, experience, or reflection, he has greatly the advantage. A future state of rewards and punishments requires the pen of a master to write upon it but tolerably well. A review of what has been published on the subject, will evince the propriety of this remark.

The Greek and Roman poets, who were the retailers of the pagan theology among the most civilized nations of antiquity, describe the happiness of the good, and the misery of the wicked, after death. But how mean the happiness! It consists in talking over their battles, in rehearsing poems, and in receiving adulation. A person acquainted with the ordinary pursuits

of men on earth, if he have but a poetic fancy, may easily, as to ideas at least, rival the description. Their state of misery is better conceived, but it is minute and low.

Mahomet, who knew something of the New Testament, thinking perhaps to improve upon it, and to give a more affecting view, has presented us with his ideas of a future world. He indeed gratifies curiosity ; but his minute descriptions are disgusting in the extreme. His state of rewards allures every sense, and every appetite : it is the happiness of an *epicure* and a wanton. His state of misery fills the soul with loathing and horror : it is the coarse imagination of an Arab, who had seen and thought of the most brutal cruelty.

Modern deists have been rather afraid of the subject. A few of them have spoken of death as the close of human existence. But there is something in this so degrading, and at the same time so irrational, that we can scarcely account for their sentiments in any other way, but by supposing that they are afraid of a world of retribution. Others, nay most of them, allow there is such a state ; but they say nothing concerning it, which can afford satisfaction to an enquiring mind. There is happiness to the good ; and some will add, there is misery to the wicked : But in what the happiness or the misery consists, where is the deist who has ventured to describe ? They seem not at home,

when a future state is the theme of discourse : we are left altogether in the dark. Their description has no substance : it is a fleeting shade which eludes our grasp. The pagan Elysium and Tartarus have a body ; but they are too gross for *reason* to endure for a single moment : we are only introduced to the Olympic games, and Dionysius's dungeon. Mahomet's description has a body too : but his paradise is an eastern seraglio ; and his hell the office of the Spanish Inquisition. Nature is overpowered, and sinks beneath the oppression of the torture.

On taking the New Testament into our hands, what a different scene is presented to our view. We are no longer left to grope in the deist's darkness : nor disgusted and shocked with the unseemly particularity of the others. The *happiness* of the disciples of Jesus is described by images natural, innocent, and most lovely : and there is always an intimation that they are but images, and are designed to represent to us a state of felicity, consisting in perfect knowledge and perfect holiness ; a felicity arising from conformity to God, and a full fruition of him, and from the society of perfectly wise and holy beings. The *misery* is described by comparisons from natural objects, which are exceedingly awful ; and which, without racking the feelings like the Koran, fill the heart with salutary terror. At the same time information is plainly conveyed, that the

misery in a great measure consists in evil dispositions and passions, in remorse and despair, and in the displeasure of a justly offended God. The superiority of the New Testament on this most difficult of subjects, must be obvious to every reader. Let him fairly ascertain the cause.

There is a peculiarity belonging to the manner in which this subject is treated, that merits notice. When men write on a future state, they are apt to throw the reins upon the neck of fancy. With the exception of the modern deists, this has always been the case. Hence their descriptions are minute to tediousness. They know not where to stop : and the author's exuberant fancy is displayed at the expence of his judgment. But we do not find this in the apostles of Christ. There is a dignified reserve. When they have advanced to a certain limit, a veil is thrown over the rest. If this had, in one or two of them, sprung from a spirit of cautious sagacity, is it not probable that others would have gone further? Might not one, at least, of a more adventurous soul, and more luxuriant fancy than his fellows, have given a loose to his imagination, and said many things which they never thought of? This might be the more naturally expected, as some never saw the writings of the others, and therefore could have no monitor or pattern to regulate their steps. The remark acquires additional force, if

we extend it to the writers of the Old Testament, to whom it is equally applicable. How shall we account for it? Was there not a divine hand guiding the pen?

SECTION VII.

The Motives proposed by the Gospel.

FROM its doctrines, precepts, and discoveries of a future state, the New Testament appears to be no common book. The *motives* it presents, though partly included in these, may yet be considered as distinct, and in a peculiar point of view. If the matter be duly examined, it will not be looked upon as a rash assertion, that it is impossible to conceive stronger motives to deter from evil, and influence to good, and consequently to banish misery and produce happiness, than those which the gospel sets before our eyes. Here every spring of action in the human heart is put in motion: Hope, fear, love, hatred, desire, aversion, gratitude, is addressed: not a chord in the heart is left untouched. Diversity in motives is of essential benefit.

Is not the fear of evil known and felt to be a powerful principle in the soul? Christ and his apostles reveal from heaven the wrath of God

against all ungodliness, and unrighteousness of man ; and enumerate the many and bitter miseries which tread on the heels of transgression, in a present life. But a future world is the state of retribution : and we are taught by him, who will sit on the tribunal at the day of judgment, “ that the wicked shall go away into everlasting punishment, where there shall be weeping, and wailing, and gnashing of teeth.” Could fear suggest a consideration more powerful, for restraining those strong propensities to evil which are in the human heart ?

But motives of a different kind are more fully, and frequently insisted on. Christianity is not the religion of a slave. It does not debase the mind with terror. It is a noble and generous system ; and abounds with motives of love, and promises of blessings, and the hopes of glory. Here we are entering on a most extensive field ; but we must pass through it in haste : yet we may enjoy something of the delightful prospect as we advance. The Supreme Being describes himself by one word, which contains volumes of ideas : GOD IS LOVE. Infinite mercy to the guilty and the miserable, meets our eye in every page. The boundless compassion and grace of the Lord Jesus, who came into the world to seek and to save that which was lost, even the chief of sinners ; and his inconceivable affection for his disciples ; are a frequent and delightful theme. The power of the sacred

Spirit, and his enlightening, sanctifying, and comforting influences, are often presented to the mind. God's paternal care of his people, his guidance, his support, his presence, his consolations in affliction, and his more than a father's regard and sympathy at the hour of death, are expressed in language never used in any other book. In addition to all these, the eternal world is unveiled before our eyes; and we are called to behold a state of the noblest and purest felicity, continuing and increasing through all eternity.

Such are the motives of the gospel; all tending to promote faith, holiness, and resignation to the divine will, and to make men like God. Stronger ones cannot be adduced. But how came these fishermen and tent-makers and publicans, to exhaust the mine? Look at the motives of ancient and modern paganism, which the votaries of *Jupiter*, of *Brahma*, and of *Fo*, have held up to the view of their worshippers! Reason blushes at the sight, and is ashamed to draw a comparison. If Mahomet could not but perceive the strength of the motives from a future state of rewards and punishments, he has sunk them from spirit to flesh: and many of those sweet, tender, and insinuating ones, which spring out of the love of God, and the compassion of the Mediator, he has entirely left out. Well informed deists will own, that *their* writers seem far more zealous in exclaim-

ing against superstition, than in urging the motives to the practice of natural religion, which even natural religion affords: but these are unspeakably inferior in number, strength, and clearness to those of christianity.

SECTION VIII.

The Characters which the New Testament is designed to form.

WE naturally judge of a system by its tendency and effects; and determine from these, whether it be good or bad. By this rule let the gospel be tried. Its principles we have traced. Let us now enquire what kind of character they are calculated to produce: and how they will appear when drawn out into real life. The formation of *character by a system* is, as it were, the sum of the principles collected into a focus, and displaying their united energy in the temper and conduct.

If I may express the whole in a few words; such as Jesus Christ was when he dwelt on earth, such it is the design of the New Testament that his disciples should be: and such it is their aim to be.

But to descend to particulars, and take a fuller view of the subject; the christian is one who

hates evil, and follows what is good. He has a constant regard to the frame of his heart, and is intent on the destruction of every sinful disposition: not one is tolerated. He loves God supremely, and it is the great business of his life to please God, in preference to his own inclinations, and the will of others. Gratitude for daily favours glows within his breast. It is his meat and drink to do the will of God, and to keep his commandments: and in the midst of affliction he submits to the dispensations of his Providence, as infinitely wise and good. To Jesus as his Saviour he constantly looks, and depends on him for the blessings of redemption: the example of Jesus he sets continually before his eyes, and endeavours, with persevering assiduity, to follow his steps.

At the same time, he regards himself as a member of the vast community of intelligent creatures upon earth: he feels himself among brethren; and he loves his neighbour as himself.—He prefers the general good to individual benefit: he acts with rectitude in every situation; and conscientiously performs all relative duties, whether domestic, political, or religious. He pities the miserable: he is ready to relieve the indigent: he forgives his enemies: he returns good for evil, and blessing for cursing. In the exercise of benevolence is his delight: his affection extends to the whole human race. Country, language, religion, colour,

are not its limits : it is bounded by human nature alone : and wherever he finds a human being, there he sees a brother, whose happiness he rejoices to promote. As the noblest part of man is the soul, its eternal felicity is his great concern.

While he feels thus for others, none can accuse him of neglecting his own concerns. Diligence, rectitude, and fidelity, mark his habitual conduct : Humility, purity, contentment, moderation, sanctity, peace of mind, and joy reign in his heart. There is besides a heroism about him which has something divine. He has learnt to be steadfast in goodness ; to proceed in the path of integrity and benevolence, unshaken by temptation, contempt, opposition ; and to follow what is good, though *alone* in the way. He is willing to submit to every privation, to undergo the most painful sufferings, and to endure death itself in the most horrid form, rather than swerve from the path of duty, or renounce the principles of truth and goodness.

I feel that I sink beneath the weight of attempting to delineate the character of a christian, and am ashamed to present so poor a sketch : but the excellence of the thing will compensate for the defect of the representation. Examine it ; and then ask yourselves : “ Where else shall we meet with such a design.” Mahomet, in a bungling way, pilfering from the

New Testament, attempted something of a resemblance; but he failed: his dispositions spoiled the whole. The Koran forms enthusiastic warriors for the faith, to shed the blood of infidels, or compel them to come into the *butcher's*, rather than the shepherd's, fold; and the slaves of sensual joys both in this life and that which is to come. The legislators of the pagan world, though some of them pretended to divine revelation, had very different thoughts and views from the apostles of Christ. Lycurgus, seemingly a man of strong nerves, and a daring spirit, aimed by his code to make the Spartans courageous and hardy soldiers, delighting in war. Another wished to inure the people to labour, and to cultivate the earth. A third sought to teach them to excel in commerce. A fourth studied to raise them to superior skill in arts, and sciences, and civilization. But to form men of such a character as has been delineated, never entered into the mind of any but the writers of the New Testament, with the sole exception of Moses and the prophets, who composed the first volume of this book, and who were animated with the same spirit. How high does this raise the scriptures above every other book! Can we conceive it possible that imposture lurks behind such a design?—The idea of such a character is not only opposite to the dispositions of bad men, but beyond the capacity even of

good men, and gives reason to conclude that it comes from God.

But the character, it may be said, is merely ideal. No: Jesus exemplified all that he required his disciples to be: and they, according to their measure, followed his steps. Such men were Peter, and John, and James, and Paul, and thousands more. Imperfections in them we can discover, and the marks of infirmity amidst the sudden gusts of temptation: but all the divine principles enumerated above, reigned in their hearts, habitually regulated their temper, and shone forth in their conduct. The blemishes we discover in them, are like the clouds flying along the sky in a summer's day, which now and then obscure the sun: but their path was like that of the just, shining more and more unto the perfect day. There have been myriads of the same spirit in every succeeding age. There are myriads still, whose highest and whose constant end in life is to realize and exhibit the character of a christian. But wickedness is noisy. goodness does not strive nor cry. The lightning and the thunder of Heaven attract universal notice by their glare and roaring: The sun moves quietly on his course, and diffuses his blessings in silence.

SECTION IX.

The Happiness which results from the Influence of the Gospel, in forming such Characters.

THE importance of the truths contained in the former section will appear more clearly, if we consider the influence which the prevalence of such a character will have on human happiness. That in the *individual* who is moulded into it, it will produce tranquillity, satisfaction, and peace resulting from the hope of the friendship of God, from the banishment of evil passions, and from the exercise of holy affections and the noblest principles, every competent judge of human nature will readily grant. Let all the *members of a family* be animated by these sentiments and dispositions: it becomes the abode of love and joy. A town full of *citizens* of this description is a holy brotherhood, where harmony reigns; and a reciprocation of kind offices renders neighbourhood and social intercourse unspeakably pleasing. Were a country filled with such *inhabitants*, it would exhibit such a scene of felicity as the world never yet beheld. All would perform the duties of their station with fidelity, and would exhibit integrity in their dealings, and would seek the general good, and make private give

way to public benefit. There would be peace, and union, and abundance, and contentment, and the love of order, and veneration for the institutions of society. Tyranny, insubordination, and anarchy, would be unknown.

O that Europe were full of people of this character ! There would be a strife who would be the first in proposing an end to war, and have the honour of soliciting reconciliation. Peace would be easily made ; for pride, avarice, ambition, revenge, the love of glory, and the lust of domination, would have no vote in the congress. Rectitude, benevolence, and compassion for the miserable, sitting alone in council, would bring the negotiation to a speedy close. They would all embrace as brethren ; and it would be easy to live in peace, because the seeds of war in the human heart are destroyed.

But mere abstinence from injury would not satisfy men of such a spirit. No longer possessed with the evil demon, falsely called patriotism, which taught and impelled them to seek the exaltation of their own country on the ruin of others, they would feel it a duty and a pleasure to promote the prosperity and happiness of each other. Instead of proving, as has hitherto been the case, *a curse*, nations would be a *blessing* to each other ; and, in the spirit of the gospel, love a neighbouring country as their own. When any of those causes occurred

which have hitherto, alas! deluged the fields of Europe with blood, christian love, mutual forbearance, forgiveness of injuries, returning good for evil, and requiting insults by benefits, would tie the bonds of peace and amity closer and stronger than they were before.

But still more widely is the influence of these divine principles felt. Asia, Africa, and America, rejoice at the change in the sons of Europe. Instead of beholding strangers grasping at every advantage, and pursuing by every means an increase of power and commerce, they find men who act as brothers; who are as forward to confer benefits, as to receive them; nay more anxious to do them good, than to possess their wealth. They are astonished at the pleasing alteration; and they conclude that principles which lead men to act thus, must be from God. While benevolent Europeans labour to do them good, and to make them happy, they eagerly enquire, “Whence proceeds this remarkable change? Formerly you were a curse, and we viewed you with dread. Our gold, our territory, our very persons, you snatched away. Now you are a blessing: your highest end is to confer benefits upon us. Whence did you derive *these* principles, which have indeed made you new creatures?”

“Read this book,” the Europeans reply, putting the New Testament into their hands,

“ we have translated it into your tongue, that you may, like us, derive from the perusal, wisdom, goodness, and felicity.”—They eagerly snatch the book: they read it: they too are made wise unto salvation: and the happiness it imparts is enjoyed throughout the world. Arms become useless: magazines are opened: arsenals are emptied. “ Let not our eyes,” they say, “ any more behold the heart-rending sight. Convert these huge cannons into instruments of husbandry; these destructive balls into mattocks and shovels: beat these swords into plough-shares, and these spears into pruning hooks.” Mankind live in peace. Extended intercourse produces increasing affection. Wherever man meets man, he meets a brother: love to God, and love to men reigning in the heart, generate every where righteousness, harmony, benevolence, and joy.

Can principles, so directly tending to felicity, and producing it in every form, spring from imposture, and from the hearts of bad men? Satan’s kingdom would be divided against itself, and must fall. Characters so formed, do they not proclaim their original to be from above, and not from beneath? Does not the scheme announce its author to be the infinitely merciful and gracious God, who delights in the happiness of his creatures, and who has framed it with such wisdom, that it suits every relation, and renders, at once, the individual and the

world happy? Will it be said, this is a mere *Utopian dream*? It will be granted, however, that it is a pleasing one. But is it not the natural result of the influence of the principles of the gospel on the heart? Nor, to him who believes the scriptures, is it an imaginary state of things which has been described. The faint representation which has been attempted, is consonant to the predictions of the Old and New Testament, which plainly foretel and describe, in the most glowing and lovely colours, the full establishment of knowledge, goodness, and felicity over the face of the whole earth, by the establishment of the gospel of Jesus Christ, in the hearts of men. Isaiah, chap. ii. and xi. Micah. iv. Rev. xx.—I ask no more, but that you would thoroughly weigh the subject, and throw its just weight into the scale of evidence.

SECTION X.

There is every thing in the New Testament which a Revelation from God may be expected to contain.

BEFORE God has given a revelation of his will, for a man to say, precisely, what it will contain, would be just as absurd as for an angel before the creation of the earth which we inhabit, to have attempted to describe what kind of a

world God would make. When it is created, he may form an accurate idea of it: and may clearly perceive the wisdom, power, and goodness of God, displayed in its formation, and in its various parts. It is thus in respect to divine revelation. The wisest of the human race must have groped in the dark before it was given, and could form no distinct view of its nature. Every sober enquirer now may discover clearly how well it suits the necessities of man; and how much it manifests the perfections of God, and is calculated to promote his glory.

Every thing necessary for us to know, is here revealed. God instructs us in his nature and excellencies. Various books have made pretensions to a divine origin; but there is not so much said of God, nor is there so full and enlarged a view of God in them all, as in the New Testament alone. Human nature is delineated in all its parts, in all its principles, and in all its wants. The character of Christ furnishes a model for the imitation of every intelligent being. The doctrines of a mediator, and redemption through him, present a remedy for the wants and miseries of mankind; and open the way to everlasting blessedness. In the precepts of the gospel there is a full and perfect rule of temper and conduct. A future state is unveiled, and we are presented with a view both of the happiness of the righteous, and of the misery of the wicked: and in addi-

tion to this, every motive which can influence the heart, is set before us in all its force.

In short, there is nothing of value which men need to know, but is here taught. I will not say there is nothing we can *desire*; for we may desire to know many things which are not revealed. But I will confidently assert, that every thing which sober reason can say it is necessary for us to know, in order to the direction of our conduct, and to the real comfort of a present state of being, is here revealed with inimitable simplicity, purity, and precision.

An inattentive reader of the New Testament may say, “ what is all this to the purpose: and what proof does it afford of a divine revelation?” But the judicious and reflecting enquirer who is in search of principles, and who is determined to examine with care whatever professes to be a revelation from God, will not satisfy himself with asking, “ What external evidence “ is there of its divinity ;”—but in the first place, “ What are the things which it contains, and delivers as heavenly truths, that I may know what it is, which the evidence is to confirm.” This is the proper method of proceeding: and whoever will take the pains to search profoundly into the principles which have been presented to view: and survey them in their light, sanctity, extent, and fullness; and give due weight to the consideration, that there is every thing in them necessary to the perfec-

tion of human nature in goodness and felicity, will see abundant reason to conclude, that they are worthy of an infinitely excellent Being to reveal, that they carry with them a presumption of their divine original, and if they be accompanied with external evidence, are to be embraced as a revelation from Heaven.

CHAPTER II.

OF THE EVIDENCE FOR THE DIVINE AUTHORITY OF THE
NEW TESTAMENT, ARISING FROM CONSIDERATIONS
SUGGESTED BY ITS CONTENTS.

THE preceding chapter presents a system of religious principles, with which every one should be well acquainted, who means to study, with advantage, the evidences of christianity. They indeed themselves form a body of evidence, of which those who are in quest of truth from pure motives, will feel the force in no ordinary degree. For want of the knowledge of these principles, many valuable treatises have been read with little effect. But when the nature of christianity is understood, its excellence seen, and its importance felt, there is a field prepared by previous cultivation for the reception of the seed of evidence, which, there is reason to believe, will spring up, and bring forth fruit abundantly unto everlasting life. So long as the mind is ignorant of the principles of the gospel, reading on its evidences is like sowing on the highway, or on a rock.

Besides the evidences arising from the doctrines of the gospel, there are some considerations closely connected with them, and suggested by the contents, spirit, structure, and

design of the New Testament, which merit particular attention. If they do not of themselves amount to a full proof that it is divine, they at least render it plain, that it is the most extraordinary book which was ever written: they strengthen the presumption in its favour; and they lay a still stronger and surer foundation for external evidence to rest upon.

SECTION I.

The New Testament conveys more Improvement to the Mind than any other Book.

MOST of the men who composed this book, spent their early days in manual employments. They lived about three years with Christ, as his disciples. After his death they became teachers of his religion; and they wrote the New Testament. The Grecian philosophers, and some Romans, spent all their days in the pursuits of literature; and in the acquisition of knowledge. They also wrote books. On a comparison, judging merely from the character of the writers, which may be expected to excel!—Can it be a question? Can any imagine these unlettered Jews capable of writing a book to be even named after the works of men of such exalted genius as the Grecian sages? But let both be examined with impartiality; and it

will be found, that with respect to real information and knowledge, the New Testament is as far above the best heathen writings, as the heavens are above the earth. It may indeed be justly asserted, that the New Testament, connected with the Old, here stands alone; and has neither equal, nor second. The knowledge it conveys concerning God, his perfections and government; concerning man, his nature, duty, and happiness; concerning the present world, and a future state of retribution; in short, concerning every object which it is important for us to be acquainted with, is unequalled.

The ideas are most excellent, most abundant, and expressed with clearness and simplicity. The imagination may be more entertained with the decorations of fancy in other books; the taste may be more gratified with elegant composition; but no where else is there such a mass of interesting truths, on every subject which concerns man as a citizen of this world, and as an immortal creature. In both these respects the New Testament contains the greatest measure of mental improvement; and tends to make men not only more pious and moral than all other books can, but likewise more *rational* and wise.

The argument will derive still more weight from the consideration, that the whole mass of truth in the gospel is not discerned at once.

From the day when it was written to the present time, every age has found out something new. During the two last centuries, how many important discoveries have been made of latent truths, which are now clear as the light of day. Nor is the mine exhausted. From the same field, wise and good men will by persevering research continue to present their precious and ample treasures, as the reward of pious industry.

If any thing more be thought necessary to produce a conviction of its superior excellence, let it be compared with other books. I need not say, “compare it with the Koran:” for the good ideas there are borrowed from the New Testament. Or shall I say, compare it? and you will perceive the man of Mecca often corrupting what he pilfers, defiling it with prejudices and passions, while it passes through his mind, and blending it with his own absurd reveries. I need not compare it with the books of christian writers; because they glory in having derived their sentiments from the code of their religion. You urge me to compare it with the writings of modern deists. But the comparison would be unfair. They borrowed their ideas of moral truths from the New Testament: they lighted their taper at the fire of this sun. If you can point out *one good principle* in them, which is not contained in it, there will then, and not till then, be room

to boast. But compare them if you will; I am not afraid of the issue.—The just line of comparison is with the most celebrated books, in the eastern and western parts of the world, before the coming of Christ. Let the sages of Greece and Rome; let the votaries of *Brahma*, and of *Po*, produce their sacred books for a critical inspection on this point. I am confident that every fair opponent will, without a moment's hesitation, give the palm to the men of Galilee.

But whence comes it to pass, that these unlettered men should be able to write the best, the most instructive book which the world contains; and that none since, in any country or age, have been able to improve upon it, or write a better? Some adequate cause must be assigned. Those who, instead of a satisfactory answer, would laugh, and ridicule the book, must retire from the field occupied by *fair reasoners*, and respectable antagonists, to the ground allotted to the unrespectable *corps of buffoons*. When they are gone, let the others judge, *who* acts the wisest part,—the opponent of the gospel, who rejects the most improving book that was ever written? or the christian who receives it, and accounts for its pre-eminence, from its being written by the inspiration of infinite wisdom?

SECTION II.

There are no false Principles in the New Testament.

WHEN I read the writings of those ancient historians, orators, poets, or philosophers, which are so highly celebrated as to form the text-books of modern education, I am grieved to see the multitude of false principles with which they abound. *Ambition* is fostered and recommended: *the love of fame* encouraged: *military glory* is displayed before the youthful throng, in the most fascinating colours: and *those* are represented as the first of human kind, who bear away the laurels from the ensanguined field. *Literary pride* is fanned, and incense offered to adepts in science. *Admiration of wealth* and distinction is generated; and the *profanum vulgus* (the poor people) is pointed at as an object of hatred or contempt.

From these revered, may I not add *idolized* authors, I turn to the New Testament; and I find myself in a new world. What a difference of mind and heart! A spark of the same spirit I do not perceive: I cannot discover one false principle from beginning to end. If it be said, I am a partial judge, I challenge the acutest unbeliever to peruse the book with this view.

Let him point out one false principle stated with approbation, or recommended to imitation; and I will give up its claim to divine authority. But no such thing is to be found.

Here is a remarkable phenomenon which must be accounted for by deists, in a satisfactory manner. Will it be said, "They were *Jews*?" But does this remove the difficulty? How came *they* to be wiser than other people? Merely their being Jews, will not solve the difficulty. Josephus was a Jew. He lived nearly at the same time with the writers of the New Testament. But in "*The Antiquities of his nation*," and in his "*History of the War with the Romans*," it is easy to detect a considerable number of false principles. Philo, his cotemporary, is chargeable with the same faults. The talmuds, the productions of the most learned Rabbi's of a following age, are still worse.

But what is more remarkable, we do not find a freedom from false principles in christian writers, though they derived their ideas of truth and duty from the New Testament. Commentaries have been written on this book in almost every age. With a pure text before them, they have had every advantage for furnishing the world with a pure comment: but they do not succeed. In the ancient fathers, how easy is it to perceive the false principles of converted pagans and philosophers. In lat-

ter ages, the false principles of the Feudal system often rise before our eyes. Every commentary of the last century, without exception, though it was more enlightened than any preceding, will furnish the attentive reader with many examples of the same thing. How extraordinary must this appear to the adept in moral science! Some fishermen of Galilee wrote a book, in which not one false principle is to be found. There is no other book, in which they are not to be found. We find them crowded in the wisest of the ancient heathens. They are to be found in cotemporary and succeeding Jews. They are to be found in christian commentators, from the days of the apostles to the present time. Nor would the most enlightened disciples of Jesus, who now adorn his church, be able wholly to escape the same censure. Were they to attempt to write a history like that of the gospel, how many errors should we find, and how many faults!

Let him who rejects the New Testament, assign a reason for this. Will he say, "Though christians have not been able to write a book without interspersing false principles, a Hume, a Gibbon, a Voltaire, a Rousseau, could with ease accomplish it?" May not a christian with justice retort, "What they could do, is best known by what they have done?" But do we not perceive in them, false principles, and evil dispositions without number? Were this a

treatise, and not a *sketch*, how easy would it be to bring them forward justifying a disregard of God and of his worship, and patronizing or recommending pride, ambition, sensuality, a contempt of others, &c. &c. &c. It will, indeed, be obvious to the most inadvertent observer, that no standard of moral sentiments and conduct is lower than theirs. Still, then, the New Testament stands alone, and without a rival. Divine inspiration will account for its superiority and singularity. Let him, who will not allow this, assign a more satisfactory reason.

SECTION III.

The New Testament is in direct Opposition to every depraved Principle in Human Nature.

LAWs, it has been asserted, must be suited to the dispositions and manners of the people for whom they are made. Divine rectitude scorns the idea. Let laws, it says, be perfectly good, however bad the persons for whom they are designed. The former is, indeed, the dictate of human policy; and men, guided by no higher principles, have acted according to it, both in ancient and modern times. This was the wis-

dom of the ancient legislators among the heathens: and many in modern times have laughed loud at the folly of attempting to give a perfect code of laws, to an imperfect and depraved nation. The religion which the legislators of old blended in their system, was of a piece with their laws; and was designed to be sweet to the taste of their vicious countrymen. It required few sacrifices, and those not painful: it indulged eager appetites, and heated passions. Mahomet acted on the same principles. How gratifying are many of his maxims to flesh and blood! To be allowed to retain and to cherish evil dispositions in the heart, and yet be on the road to paradise, is beyond measure delicious to every lover of iniquity. We are not to wonder, if such systems were received without a struggle, by those to whom they were proposed. Is this the cause, that the Koran is more respectfully spoken of by many modern deists, than the New Testament? They will at least own, that none of their party have ever appeared the advocates for an austere morality.

But here is a religion which declares open war, and irreconcilable enmity with every evil disposition in the human heart. It tolerates none: it denounces an anathema against all. Of the most odious sins, disobedience to parents, dishonesty, injustice, murder, and adul-

tery, it speaks with abhorrence: it says they ought not even to be named among christians. But this is not all: it descends into the heart; it puts forth its hand and plucks out every root of bitterness which, springing up, would pollute the soul, and defile the life. Many principles which the world approves, as ambition, the eager pursuit of wealth, fondness for pleasure, pride, envy, revenge, contempt of others, emulation, the gospel condemns. These the world considers on many occasions to be harmless, in some commendable: christianity condemns them all, in every form and degree. It forbids the indulgence of them even in thought; and commands the desire to be strangled in its birth. Neither the hands, the tongue, the head, nor the heart, must be guilty of one iniquity. However much the world may applaud the heroic ambition of one, the love of glory in another, the successful pursuits of affluence in a third, the high-minded pride, the glowing patriotism which would compel all the neighbouring nations to bow the neck, the steady pursuit of revenge for injuries received, and a sovereign contempt of the rude and ignoble vulgar; christianity condemns them all, and enjoins the disciples of Jesus to crucify them without reluctance, and without delay. Not one is to be spared, though dear as a right-eye, for use or pleasure; or even ne-

cessary as a right-hand for defence or labour. While the gospel insists on the destruction of evil principles, the exercise of the opposite dispositions, humility, contentment, meekness, charity, forgiveness, perfection, &c. is strictly enjoined. As a specimen, read the words of the book itself. Matt. v. 43, 44, 45, 48. "Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy : but I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you ; that ye may be the children of your father in heaven : for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust. Be ye therefore perfect, even as your father, which is in heaven is perfect." Rom. xii. 20, 21. "Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves : but if thine enemy hunger, feed him ; if he thirst, give him drink : for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire upon his head. Be not overcome of evil ; but overcome evil with good." 1 Peter, iii. 9. "Not rendering evil for evil, or railing for railing ; but, contrariwise blessing ; knowing that ye are thereunto called, that ye should inherit a blessing."

What a system of opposition to evil, and of the purest goodness, is here ! To what source shall we trace it ? From beneath, such divine

sentiments cannot come. Nor do they grow on earth: They spring not from the human heart; for no such seeds have been sown there. Will it be thought unreasonable if I should say, “ They must have come down from heaven?”

SECTION IV.

Men never get before the New Testament.

FOR centuries past, the world has been in a state of gradual improvement, which is still increasing with accelerated rapidity. Ancient ages, even the most renowned, we have far outstripped in every useful science: and by means of modern discoveries, their most famous books are found extremely deficient. Within the limits of the eighteenth century, this has been remarkably the case. How many treatises regarded as master-pieces, at the beginning, were looked upon as antiquated, before the end. When we consider the intense application of thousands of enlightened and highly cultivated minds, all in quest of new discoveries, and all endeavouring to improve on what was written before, we shall not wonder at this advancement.

We are naturally led to enquire, how it is in reference to religion, and whether the New Testament stands its ground. A full proportion of learned men have applied themselves to the study of the principles of religion and morals, and to those sciences connected with them, which have respect to moral obligation and privilege. But have any of them outstripped the New Testament, as the moderns have outstripped the ancient philosophers? Have they found out any part of the character of God which it does not display; or any duty which it does not inculcate?—No: after all their researches, and with all the additional knowledge of eighteen centuries, they have not moved a step before it. Nay, they may perceive the New Testament is still before them.

In these latter times, many conceive that considerable progress has been made in the knowledge of that part of morals which respects individual, and domestic, but especially national relations. After having viewed these pretensions, which profess to have their basis fixed on the principles of eternal justice, let us turn to the New Testament, and examine if these men have outstripped *it*. But we find there all these noble sentiments, the force and extent of which were not perceived before, that are applicable to what is good in them, and to those things which are really improvements;

and countenancing and enjoining them by the spirit of the gospel. Is it not astonishing, that whenever any useful discovery in moral science has been made, it is found that the New Testament contains it, though unnoticed before? This has been the case from century to century: it is so still: and, no doubt, there are many divine principles of morals in this book, which the progress in knowledge, of this and future ages, will enable men to perceive.

But whence comes this peculiar quality? The vast comprehensive knowledge of the Spirit of God who indited it, can alone be assigned as a rational, and satisfactory cause. If christianity had been the invention of men, it would have shared the fate of all other systems of the like origin: The improvements of modern times would have left it far behind.

This has been the case with all the pagan religions. A person in the present age, who had written on theological subjects, though of moderate abilities, instead of considering it as a compliment, would think himself grossly insulted, if you were to say to him, "I admire your book: your ideas of God and religion are fully on a level with the Grecian mythology, the Indian Shasters, and the system of Confucius." Nor would he think that justice was done him, unless it were granted, that he had surpassed the Koran of Mahomet, in his representations of truth and duty. But the plain

illiterate fishermen, publicans, and tent-makers of Judea and Galilee, after the lapse of eighteen centuries, are still masters in religion and morals. No man in all that time has stepped one foot before them.—Let those who will not allow that they were taught of God, assign a satisfactory reason for their pre-eminence.

SECTION V.

The Fulness of the New Testament.

THE world is filled with books, and great numbers of them are excellent. How many men of the first talents have written admirably on the subject of religion! Every age can boast of its celebrated authors, who have consecrated themselves to the instruction of mankind. I have read many of them with pleasure and improvement: but I find, that, when I have gone through them three or four times, I have gained all their ideas. In spite of me they become flat and uninteresting, and I am obliged to lay them aside; for I can no longer read them with pleasure.

But the New Testament forms an exception to this rule. I have read many parts of it, hundreds of times: and can read them again to-

morrow, with equal relish as at first. Whenever I peruse it with serious attention, I discover something new ; and the more attentively and devoutly I do so, I discover the more : and new ideas spring out of the words and subject, and enrich my mind. Besides, I am never weary of reading it : It presents new charms to me every day : and like bread made of the finest of the wheat, it is always agreeable to the taste. The more I read, the more I love it : and the more intimate my acquaintance, the stronger is my affection for it. I have my favourite authors on religion ; and I frequently peruse them. They are men of genius, learning, and piety. But they are only children, in comparison of the fishermen of Galilee : and I find a fulness and sweetness in their writings, which the others do not possess.

Whence comes this astonishing difference ? Allow the New Testament to be written by inspiration ; and the reason will be easily assigned. The Holy Spirit of God, whose understanding is infinite, can put such a number of ideas into a book, as it shall unspeakably surpass the power of man to do, which shall one after another appear to the pious reader, and amply reward his researches. He can likewise so fill the book with *good*, as well as with *truth*, that it shall delight the heart, as well as enlighten the mind, and have such undescribable charms,

that it shall be always sweet, and fill the soul with the highest degree of mental pleasure. To these causes I ascribe its astonishing fulness.

But how will ye who call the New Testament a common book, or a forgery, account for this singularity? To deny the fact, will not avail. The observation before us has been made by thousands of persons, both illiterate, and learned, in every age: and against such a mass of evidence, the assertion of those who have read, merely with a view to find fault and to condemn, will not weigh much in the balance of impartial reason. The testimony of bats and owls, to the loveliness of the gloom of night, and against the beauty of the light of the sun, would not be heard in opposition to the unanimous declaration of the inhabitants of the earth, and of the air, to the contrary. But ought I to use such a comparison? My design is not to irritate, but to convince; not to triumph over an enemy, but to reclaim a friend and a brother, who, to my grief, has gone astray; and to lead his feet into the way of peace.

SECTION VI.

The Scheme of the Divine Government, as represented in the New Testament, is vast and extensive.

WHILE the past and the present occupy a certain portion of our thoughts and time, it is natural to look into futurity, and to conjecture what will come to pass. How often has this been the theme of the most ingenious writers! But we observe in them the attributes of man. Their plans of the divine conduct in the regulation of human affairs are extremely limited in extent; and they seem in haste for the execution. Beyond a century, or two at most, their views scarcely ever extend for the accomplishment of their plans: more commonly they are comprised within a still narrower space. They are eager to see their expectations realized; and often place the event within such a period, that they may have the satisfaction of witnessing it.

How different is the disposition of the writers of the New Testament! They present to us a view of the divine government; but the fore-mentioned peculiarities are not to be found. The plan embraces a vast variety of objects: It advances by what we would call very slow degrees: It comprises within its grasp some thou-

sands of years. It gives time for every thing. The prophets of the Old Testament allowed four thousand years to elapse before the coming of the Messiah. The Apostles of Christ assign twelve hundred and sixty years to the dominion of Anti-christ, from his rise to his fall,—a duration of which, no other class of men were ever able to bear the thought. After this immense space, christianity, they say, will overcome all opposition, and be universal on the earth.

How much this scheme resembles the course both of the natural and the moral world, must be obvious to all. Plants spring gradually from seed: trees grow still more slowly; and ages pass on before some of them arrive at maturity. In man, as an *individual*, the progress of improvement is far from rapid: In *communities* it is still slower. How many centuries roll on, before a nation passes from a barbarous state to a high degree of civilization.—It must be allowed to be, at least, an extraordinary circumstance, that the New Testament should, in this respect, differ so materially from all other books; and that it should, at the same time, so perfectly accord with the actual state of the divine government. The degree of weight in it is submitted to the consideration of the reader.

SECTION VII.

*The Appearances and Tendency of the Moral World
confirm the Principles of Christianity.*

THERE is a pleasing concord in the operations of the Supreme Being. The Governor of the world will not act contrary to its Creator ; nor the Benefactor of the human race, to the Governor of the universe. If christianity be a religion from God, it will correspond with the works of God, and appear in harmony with his government of the world. Sir ISAAC NEWTON framed a system of philosophy, and recorded the laws of nature, as written by the finger of God, upon the broad tables of the heavens and the earth. After the lapse of a century, the motions of the celestial bodies, and the various operations and revolutions which he described, correspond with his system. This correspondence is considered as an evidence of its probability, some will say, of its certain truth. In like manner should the state, order, and tendency of things in the moral world, correspond with the gospel of Christ, will it not strongly evince the probability of its being, what it professes to be, “ of divine authority ? ” Eighteen centuries have elapsed since its promulgation ; and we may search in the full trea-

asures of experience, with a certainty of finding either an evident confutation of its pretensions, or a strong presumption of its truth.

Christianity professes to be the true religion. True religion is the art of happiness taught by God himself. Christ says that “the weary and heavy-laden shall find in him rest to their souls; and that his yoke is easy, and his burden is light.” Matt. xi. 28—30. He likewise promises an unceasing happiness, as the certain accompaniment of increasing attention to his gospel, and conformity to his will, and imitation of his example. Of the truth and reality of this, christians are indeed the only competent judges. They find wisdom’s ways to be ways of pleasantness, and her paths peace; and their happiness to be augmented in proportion to their activity in glorifying God, and doing good to men.—But even to the enemies of the gospel we can here appeal, as they are able to give *their* testimony, which likewise issues in its favour. You can perceive that integrity of heart and life, that the performance of relative duties, and, in a more eminent degree, that philanthropy, actively engaged in lessening the miseries, and augmenting the enjoyments of all around, brings with it a considerable degree of felicity. Did you but know the working of humility, of meekness, of gentleness, of forgiveness of injuries, of love to the souls of men, and, above all, of love to

God and the Redeemer; and did you feel the energy and goodness of the principles of the gospel, from which they flow, you would readily acknowledge that the religion of Jesus produces in the soul the highest measure of happiness which is to be enjoyed on earth.—The other part of the argument is more plain: disregard of religion, or, in other words, wickedness, is followed by misery. Every evil disposition has a sting which pierces the heart: and the indulgence of vicious passions strips the soul of real enjoyment. Pride, avarice, sensuality, hatred, malice, envy, revenge, and forgetfulness of God, are all enemies to the felicity of man: They rob the soul of tranquillity, and they fill it with uneasiness and distress.

In proportion to the *degree* of goodness, or of wickedness, is the *degree* of happiness, or of misery which men feel. The winged activity of the disciple of Jesus, in adoring his God and Saviour, and doing good to men, enlarges the spirit of piety and benevolence, gives a higher relish to the pleasure of conferring benefits, and renders him more blessed in his deeds. On the other hand, the more a man increases in wickedness, the more miserable he grows. His evil passions boil over in his words and actions, and make all who are around him wretched: but his own soul feels the torment most.

The tendency of these, both as to the years of life which are to come, and likewise to a future state, is just the same. "Light is sown for the righteous; and gladness for the upright in heart." "But there is no peace to the wicked." Still brighter prospects are presented to the christian, as he advances in the path of faith and holiness; and confirm the declaration, that "the path of the just is as the morning light, which shineth more and more unto the perfect day." A continued tendency of an increase of happiness till death, gives the highest probability of a still greater accession in a future state. On the other hand, nothing is more evident than that wickedness presents no other prospect, but that of being wretched both here and hereafter. The slave of vice till old age, becomes a perfect demon; and is fit for nothing but the misery of another world, which the gospel describes as the punishment of those who reject it.

If we extend our views from the individual to the *community*, we find "that righteousness exalteth a nation;" and that sin is its disgrace and ruin. The prevalence of pure religion in its principles and acts, promotes the public welfare in the highest degree, diffuses social felicity far and wide, and tends to a continual increase. While, on the other hand, a disregard and opposition to religion, which is but another name for wickedness, is productive of

the worst of evils to a kingdom: it lessens their enjoyments; and tends to a constant accumulation of misery. The deep laid plans of unrighteous policy, which promise the most extensive and lasting advantages, prove unsubstantial as the spider's web, become a source of bitterness to the contrivers, and issue in national distress and calamity. These are laws of nature, or shall we not rather say, of the Supreme Ruler, which confirm by their execution, the revelation of Jesus Christ; and display the effects and consequences of his religion.

There is a still more extensive tendency in the divine government, which, as belonging to the present subject, ought not to pass unnoticed. The gospel speaks of the melioration of the state of mankind, which after a lapse of ages is to be produced by the influence of its principles and precepts. By appearances in the moral world, these hopes are cherished and confirmed. The man who will compare the present state of society in England, in Holland, and in France, with that which subsisted in them about three hundred years ago, will perceive a most rapid progress: and the vast machine is moving with accelerated speed. There are principles now budding in the minds of the disciples of Christ, which are producing plans of active benevolence, in order to advance the first and best interests of the human race;

principles which, when the fruit is brought to maturity, will change the face of the world, and introduce the reign of reason and of love, and give happiness to mankind ; because they introduce the reign of God, and of his Christ, over the souls of men.

The coincidence between the government of the world, and the christian religion, in so many varied points of view ; and the agreement between the appearances and tendency of the former, and the declarations and effect of the latter, are considerations not unworthy of the notice of those who are examining, with impartiality and care, the evidences of the New Testament.

SECTION VIII.

The Manner in which the New Testament addresses Men.

HERE, as in many other points, the book is eminently singular. In men who had no intercourse with the great world, we might expect to find either an admiration of the rich and powerful, or a dislike of them, and a partiality for people of their own rank. But nothing of this is to be seen. We scarcely find a writer who has not his partialities : one is a sycophant

of the great, and a despiser of the poor: another hates the great, and makes his court to the multitude, that he may gain their favour. Some pay homage to the learned, and treat the ignorant with contempt: others take the contrary side. Country and religion have a powerful influence on men's sentiments, and on their manner of speaking of persons and things. Both Jewish and Gentile writers furnish remarkable instances of this, each in an opposite way.

But here is a perfect exception to these modes of writing. The whole human race is always considered in the New Testament as one great family. The apostles view man as an *immortal being*: This is the light in which he constantly appears. The different conditions of life sink into nothing in comparison of this more illustrious rank. The only reason why they notice the various stations in civil society is to remind men of the duties of these stations, and to guard them against the temptations to which they are exposed. This is peculiarly the case as to persons in the most exalted condition, the temptations of which they represent as the strongest of any: they therefore kindly entreat them to watch against their influence with the utmost care: and at the same time they frankly reprehend their abuse of the blessings of their condition. If they speak favourably of the poor, it is to console them, because their temptations are not so strong, and to point out those

advantages in their lot which they are apt to overlook. But in all the grand concerns of human nature they view men as equals: they speak to them as brethren: they envy not the great: they despise not the poor: they address all with dignity and affection. There is indeed one marked difference which they ever maintain, and never in any one instance, lose sight of for a moment. But it arises from nothing external: it is that which takes place between the *righteous* and the *wicked*. Such greatness of mind as this, which overlooks all worldly distinctions; which attaches dignity to man as immortal, and excellence to man as good, and meanness only to man as wicked; found in illiterate men, and found in all the writers of the New Testament, will be allowed to have some weight, when thrown into the scale which contains the evidences of christianity.

SECTION IX.

The Harmony of the Writers of the New Testament.

DISAGREEMENT among persons who contribute each a part towards the compilation of a volume, infers the certain destruction of its claims to divine inspiration. Harmony is absolutely necessary: and where it is found, es-

pecially in so extensive a manner, and in so many different points of view, and in matters so various and complicated, it furnishes a presumptive argument in favour of its claim.

The first thing which we are led to enquire, is, What harmony subsists between the gospel and *natural religion*? On the most accurate examination it will be found, that there is not one principle in the latter, which the former does not advance, and confirm. Could the deist find opposition here, he might justly triumph: But he can produce none. The concord is without an exception, as to principles, precepts, desires, wants, and expectations. The gospel is indeed fuller, and reveals many things which the other does not contain. But this is naturally to be expected in a revelation made for the use of guilty and depraved creatures, who need a remedy beyond the power of natural religion to provide.

Another part of the subject is the harmony of this book with the *Old Testament*, which is to be considered as a first volume of the work, and so closely interwoven with it, as to be incapable of separation without a material injury to both. When a book is entirely the production of one man, the harmony is more easy: where many are concerned in writing it, the difficulty is increased. When the persons live in different ages, in different countries, in different conditions and employments, and in dif-

ferent states of society, a difference of ideas and sentiments on many subjects, especially the highest and most comprehensive, is the natural result: and harmony, if it be found, may be considered as very remarkable. There are cases where art could not possibly produce it. For example, where the earlier writers not only look back to what is past, but likewise predict what is to come, and publish the institution of ceremonial rites, which are to meet with their accomplishment in a following dispensation that they are designed to prefigure, collusion becomes impossible: and harmony is no wise to be accounted for, but by supposing a divine interposition and inspiration of the writers.

Such is the harmony to be found between the penmen of the Old Testament and of the New. They were men of different ages, countries, and stations. They wrote on the most difficult subjects. They had all one plan in view. Each added something as his part. The latter fill up what the former had sketched out: and both volumes confirm each other by their agreement, and exactly correspond to each other. What merits particular notice, the most ingenious and complicated part came first, the simplest and easiest, last; that it might be seen that artifice is not necessary to make the systems fit, and fit in a way which no human ingenuity could have devised. The agreement is not in one point only, but in hun-

dreds; so that the harmony between the predictions, types, sacrifices and purifying rites of the Old Testament; and the person, office, kingdom and benefits of the Messiah, in whom they had their accomplishment, can be considered in no other light, than as the effect of deep design, and an extensive premeditated plan. So remarkable has this appeared to some opposers of christianity, that they have asserted that the books of prophecy were composed after the predicted events took place. But the antiquity of the Old Testament rests on so firm a foundation, that the man who would attempt to shake it, would find all his efforts vain.

Among the *different writers* of the New Testament, and in its *different parts*, the harmony is equally clear and pleasing. Not to insist on that between the evangelists, where the coincidence may be expected to be more evident, there is an agreement in things which are apparently more incidental, and where a collusion is not so readily thought of, nor so easily effected. The *letters* to the christian societies, which make a part of the New Testament, are closely connected with the acts of the apostles, which may be called its ecclesiastical history; and are in a manner formed upon it. In these letters very frequent allusions are made to events in the history. The allusions are so many, so minute, so incidental, so much depending on

circumstances which had occurred, and so naturally arising out of the subject, that no art of man could produce agreement in such a multitude of things, if either the letters, or the history, or both were forgeries. Had the *letters* been forged, we might expect to find them couched in general terms, and cautiously avoid the mentioning of every particular which could lead to a discovery. But nothing can be more directly *opposite*. They are full of business. They are continually urging some serious and useful topic. They are making frequent references to particular societies, persons, places, things, and events. While these furnish a convincing internal proof that they are genuine, the agreement of the references in them with the history, gives additional strength to the evidence, that they are what they profess to be.

There is another branch of this harmony which should not pass unnoticed. The writers both of the New Testament, and of the Old, have occasion to advert to the *history of other nations*, and to record circumstances arising from their connection with the Jews, or with the christians. This is done without the remotest appearance of art or design. However unimportant at first sight this may seem, it enters so deeply both into the knowledge and veracity of the persons, that imposture could not escape detection. But no such charge can be adduced: for whenever a reference is made

in the New Testament to the affairs of surrounding countries, profane history confirms the credibility of the sacred writers, and sanctions their claims of being men of truth and integrity.

The harmony just displayed in its various bearings, is not that of false witnesses who have learned their lesson, but of honest men, who relate what they saw and knew, each in his own way, and what particularly struck him: Frequently one mentions one circumstance of an action or event, and another, another. This is not the harmony of men who combine to deceive the human race.

If in a book of such extent there be some *apparent contradictions*, it is nothing more than we have reason to expect. But a considerable part of them will vanish, by granting what an impartial reader cannot well refuse, that in an ancient book, so long, and so often copied, there will be errors of transcribers, especially with respect to the names of persons and places, and to chronological computations. For when we find writers accurate in things of greater moment, and greater difficulty, it is but fair to argue that they could not have erred in matters comparatively easy: and to charge the fault on them, and not on the transcribers, is unworthy of that candour which should distinguish the liberal mind.

To the progress of knowledge, and the ap-

plication of it to the study of the sacred scriptures, we are indebted for satisfactory answers to other objections against the harmony of its parts. While there are some things in the works of creation, and in the moral government of God, which display the divine perfections with the brightness of demonstration, there are others which seem in direct opposition to their existence and exercise. But however contradictory these may seem to be, we are certain, and deists will own, it is but in appearance, and cannot be so in reality: and the discoveries which have been made in science have, in many instances, reconciled the difficulties to our perfect satisfaction. This is precisely the case as to divine revelation, which bears in this, as in other respects, a close analogy to the other works of God. By profound investigation, by the collation of manuscripts, by a more perfect knowledge of eastern manners, by a more thorough acquaintance with history, by improvements in sacred criticism, and by attention to occurring events, many difficulties and apparent contradictions have been removed; and the harmony rendered clear as the light of day. If some difficulties still remain, view them as you do those of creation and providence; and they will form no obstacle to the reception of the gospel. There is little doubt, but that, like the others,

with increasing knowledge and the light of events, they also will be dispelled.

Those who deny the truth and divinity of the christian religion, (for they are closely allied,) will find it extremely difficult on their hypothesis, to account for the various analogies, and the complicated harmonies which have been just presented to their view. Let them have but their due weight in the investigation of the subject, and the writer desires no more.

CHAPTER III.

OF THE EVIDENCE FOR THE DIVINE AUTHORITY OF THE
NEW TESTAMENT, ARISING FROM THE TESTIMONY OF
THE APOSTLES.

SOME subjects are capable of being rendered certain by *mathematical* demonstration: others, which are of still greater importance to the happiness of mankind, admit only of *moral* evidence, or the evidence of testimony. This is the case with respect to all historical facts, and the administration of justice in every form. This evidence of testimony rests on a certain MORAL ORDER, which gives stability to reasoning, and renders things as certain as by any other kind of proof. That there is such a city as ROME I am as fully convinced, as that the three angles of a triangle are equal to two right angles. Yet I never saw Rome: I rest on the testimony of others. But I think my own mind as likely to be mistaken in its operations in passing from one link in the chain of mathematical demonstration to another, as that the moral evidence on which I found my belief, should be false. On what does this certainty rest? It rests on that moral order which has just been mentioned. Wherein it consists shall

be briefly shewn; and it will form a proper avenue to the field of testimony.

In the *natural world* God has established a certain order of things which I perceive uniformly take place; as the vicissitudes of day and night, the power of attraction, gravitation, &c. Hence I am enabled to judge with certainty concerning the phenomena of nature. But is there not a similar order in the moral world; and are there not laws established, from the knowledge of which we may determine, though not with absolute certainty, yet with such a degree of precision as will answer sufficiently for directing our judgment in matters of testimony? This is of still greater importance than the other: we may therefore expect it with confidence.

There are certain general principles in the human heart to which all have regard in the conduct of life; such as the pursuit of happiness, the desire of honour, a sense of favours bestowed, &c. There are besides, some peculiar principles of action arising from the different characters of men. There is a predominant or governing principle which acts as the main spring of the rational machine; and directs the conduct, and regulates the life. I observe one man eminently *pious*: a thousand instances of love to God and man blaze forth in his life. A second whom I know, is the slave of *ambition*. I have traced the passion in his

heart from his earliest years : it has grown with his growth. I am acquainted with a third, who is under the absolute dominion of *avarice* : the only business of his life is to possess. There is another, whom I have observed with attention ; he is the votary of *pleasure* ; and he has followed it as a trade for many years : The indulgence of all his appetites, and sensual passions, appears to be the sole end of his existence. There is an old friend with whom I have had dealings for many years ; and have always found to be a man of sterling and tried *integrity* : he may be trusted with untold gold. His opposite neighbour is an arrant *cheat* ; he will deceive and defraud whenever it is in his power.

From the knowledge we acquire of such characters, enlarged by the numerous lessons of history, we can judge, with tolerable accuracy, of what men will do. Is an eminent example displayed of moderation of wishes, and contentment with a little ? No one says “ Alexander, or Cæsar was the man.” If we are informed of prisoners being treated with unparalleled cruelty, we do not suspect Mr. Howard. Do we hear of a course of remarkable self-government as to appetites and passions ? Every one exclaims, “ It is neither Nero nor Heliogabalus.” If we read of a robbery, accompanied with a shocking murder, in the dead of night, laid to the charge of So-

crates or Epictetus, we throw the book away with indignation, and cry, "the charge is false." Every one can easily enlarge the list of examples.

These general, and especially these distinguishing and peculiar principles which bear sway in the hearts of men, constitute that moral order which enables us to form a judgment of human conduct. In the common affairs of life, and in things of the greatest importance to our present happiness, we are guided by the rules of this moral order, to decide what particular persons will do, and what measures they will adopt: and we thereby acknowledge its existence, and its certainty.—Will it not be equally applicable to the system of christianity, and the testimony of the apostles? It certainly is; for we are to proceed here by the very same rules of reasoning, and the same kind of evidence, as in other things which depend on testimony. Let the impartial reader, who is in search of truth, keep this constantly in view: and then let him consider, what kind of men the witnesses of Jesus were; and what degree of credit is due to the testimony which they adduce.

SECTION I.

The Quality and Number of the Witnesses.

WHAT office can be conceived more important to the happiness of mankind, than that of the persons who were to be the witnesses of Jesus, and to testify his divine mission to the world. The choice rested with himself. Had he selected them from the rabbis, and scribes, and chief priests, it might have been suspected, that there was a design, by means of human literature, to impose upon mankind. By the choice which was made, this suspicion is avoided. Christ called men from the ordinary employments of the mass of society. As to their moral improvement and character, they appear to have been plain, serious, good men, who had read the Old Testament with considerable attention, and were well acquainted with its contents.

By the mouth of two or three witnesses every end of testimony is fully answered. But the matter to be testified here, was uncommon: and therefore Christ employed a much greater number. He called *twelve*. This will be allowed to be ample. If two or three may be suspected of artifice, and may be able to unite in publishing a falsehood, it is difficult for twelve to do so. At the same time their union

in bearing testimony, will strengthen the weight of the evidence.

The persons chosen had the best *opportunities* of understanding what they were to testify. Christ admitted them into his family. They lived with him upwards of three years. He favoured them with the most intimate friendship ; and they had a perfect knowledge of his character, disposition, the actions of his life, his death, and all the wondrous scenes which followed, till they at last beheld him ascend to heaven. Nothing was kept secret from them ; and there was no reserve. The Grecian philosophers had their *esoteric*, and their *exoteric*, doctrines. Mahomet pretended a revelation from heaven, to prevent a mussulman from entering his habitation, except when requested by himself. Nothing like these is to be found in Jesus. He was accessible at every hour. His disciples saw the whole of his behaviour ; and heard the whole of his doctrine. They lived with him on terms of the greatest, yet most respectful intimacy : so that never men had fairer opportunities of knowing any matter, than were presented to the apostles, of knowing every thing relative to the character and mission of Jesus Christ.

SECTION II.

Their Qualifications for bearing Testimony to Christ.

IN those who appear to give their testimony in matters of importance, we have a right to look for two things; namely, *capacity* and *integrity*. Let us examine if they are to be found in these men.

A moderate portion of intellect will be sufficient in the present case. The thing to be testified is not a matter of abstruse speculation; but a collection of facts, on which some plain principles, naturally resulting from them, are founded. What measure of capacity a man possesses, nothing will more plainly discover, than his writing of a book. The witnesses of Jesus have done this: and the New Testament will convince every one, that there was no defect of understanding to disqualify them for the office.

But the *heart* must be sound, as well as the head. Integrity is absolutely necessary to render a testimony credible; and is indeed the chief thing. To a candid enquirer, who will give every circumstance its due weight, it must be evident, that if words in unpremeditated speech, or in writing, if a long course of actions and sufferings can demonstrate integrity,

never were there on earth more upright men than the apostles of Jesus Christ.

But sometimes, where men have appeared to possess a good understanding and unquestionable integrity, they have been so entirely under the influence of *enthusiasm*, as to become the senseless dupes of an over-heated imagination, and of intoxicated passions. Though therefore the apostles should not be impostors, yet if they be *Enthusiasts*, it renders their testimony of no avail. The remark is just; but it does not apply. Consult the records of their lives: all is wisdom and soberness. Add to this, the study of their writings. There is no enthusiasm there: a sound judgment appears from beginning to end. The subject is the highest that can employ the mind: but we find no wild flights of imagination. There are passages which express the most vigorous energies of the soul, and all the ardour of the strongest affection: but the subject lays a sufficient foundation for them; and there, rapture is *reason*, not enthusiasm. Indeed, an enemy to christianity, if he have one spark of candour remaining in his breast, must justify them from the charge.*

* The apostles, unless they really believed what they so often asserted, concerning the resurrection of Christ, could not be enthusiasts. If they stole his dead body, as the soldiers asserted, the very act must have cured them of enthusiasm. If it remained in the grave, *fraud*, and

SECTION III.

*Their Sincerity, and personal Conviction of the Truth
of their Testimony.*

FROM the manner of a person's conversation, or writing, sagacious men can judge with a considerable degree of accuracy, whether he is in earnest or not. No book has been perused with so much attention as the New Testament, both by friends and foes. One design, at least, of the enemies, has been to spy out faults. Insincerity and deceit are the greatest. But what discoveries have they made? When Mahomet introduces passages in the Koran, containing a command or permission from Heaven to multiply his wives, by adding to the number those on whom he had cast the eye of desire; and likewise to seclude them from the society of those whom jealousy feared; it requires

not enthusiasm, must have published that Jesus was risen. But their conduct shews, that they were convinced that he rose from the dead, and appeared to them afterwards, and ascended to heaven before their eyes. Hence that noble ardour for the propagation of the truth, which animated the whole of their future life. Men may call this enthusiasm if they will; but their deportment and writings clearly demonstrate, that they were the farthest of any of the human race from the character of enthusiasts, in the common despicable sense of the word.

no more than ordinary sagacity to perceive the sensual motive. But is there any thing like this in the writers of the New Testament? Every line marks sincere, disinterested, and honest men. With the utmost simplicity they mention their prejudices, their weaknesses, and their faults. The highest tone of sincerity vibrates through the whole of the book. There is a constant abhorrence of iniquity, a sense of God's presence and holiness, and a deep and clear view of him as the avenger of all iniquity. But their sincerity appears in the whole tenor of their lives and actions, in a most remarkable manner.

SECTION IV.

*Their Constancy and Perseverance in bearing
Testimony.*

ALL the apostles stood forth as witnesses to the divine mission of Jesus Christ: and their continuance in bearing testimony, year after year, to the end of life, carries with it a considerable degree of weight.

When men first engage in any remarkable service, the novelty of the situation and employment may create, for a season, a considerable alteration in their thoughts and manners:

and, in addition to this, they may for a while put a restraint upon themselves. But when the *impetus* has spent its force, they will display their true character ; and we shall see what they really are. If they have entered on the work from the mere ardour of a warm imagination, and kindled passions, or from the eager influence of false expectations, they will, when their fire is spent, and they find themselves mistaken in their hopes, quit the irksome situation, and retire to a more gainful or more pleasing employment. Had the apostles of Christ formed any plan of worldly enjoyment or advantage they must have, in a very short space of time, been completely undeceived. Did *ambition* swell their hearts? They soon found that they had nothing to expect but degradation in the eyes of the world. Were they blinded by *avarice*? They speedily learnt that they were not on the road to wealth. Was it love of ease and *pleasure* which animated their hopes? It was not long before they were fully convinced, that these were not to be found in bearing testimony to Jesus Christ. But this conviction made no alteration in their conduct : it neither led them to throw aside their office, nor did it even cool their zeal in its execution. They went on, with unshaken constancy and unabating ardour, to the end of their days, in bearing witness to their master's cause before the world.

When twelve men, whether as individuals, or at the head of communities, unite to propagate an imposture, or to execute a plan of falsehood or injustice, the event is so uniform, that we may consider it as a law of the moral world, that however amicable and cordial they may be in the beginning, they will in the progress of the business disagree, and thwart each other's views : and what commenced with oaths of secrecy, and vows of perseverance till the final accomplishment of the design, and a glowing affection to all concerned in it, is arrested in its course by jealousies, envies, hatred, mutual accusations, and the falling off of one after another ; and ends in disclosing the black design, and unveiling to the world the hollowness of their hearts. But we perceive nothing of this nature among the apostles of Christ. The same testimony which they bore at first, they bore with their dying breath. One of them proved a traitor ; but he had no secrets to tell. " I have sinned," he cries out in agony, " in that I have betrayed innocent blood." Paul and Barnabas had a warm dispute, and separated from each other : but it was to do apart, what they had done together ; namely, to bear witness to the divine mission of Jesus of Nazareth. A temporary disagreement took place between Peter and Paul, but in their heat they have no black imposture to bring to light : they have no accusation against

the cause of Christ. With the exception of the unhappy Judas, whose mournful confession was full in its favour, constancy in declaring to the world, with affection and fervour, that Jesus is the Christ, was the attribute of all the rest.

SECTION V.

Their Sufferings for the Sake of their Testimony.

HAD the apostles not been the men they professed to be, their manner of life must have been one continued scene of suffering. To persons who were nourishing evil passions in their hearts, and panting after worldly enjoyments, the constant mortification to which they submitted, and the entire application of the soul to spiritual and divine things through the whole course of their thoughts, and words, and actions, must have been an intolerable burden. Christianity was not like the systems of the philosophers, a code of speculative opinions, which left men at liberty to live as they pleased; but it prescribed a rule of life which directed the conduct, temper, and sentiments, even to the very thoughts of the heart; and called men to be entirely different from what they were before. Nothing but the existence and power

of the principles of the gospel on the heart could have rendered such a life as that of the apostles tolerable, or in fact could have produced it. But to them, as being filled with the spirit of their master, the christian life was not a burden, but their delight: "Christ's yoke was easy, and his burden light; because they had learned of him who was meek and lowly in heart."

But while in Christ they had peace, in the world they had tribulation, on account of their testimony. Instead of finding riches, honours, and pleasures in the execution of their office, it drew upon them the bitterest persecution. Every kind of indignity was offered: every kind of injury sustained. It was not in one or two instances that this took place: they found, by painful experience, that nothing else was to be expected but a continued course of suffering, while they continued to testify of Christ that he is the Saviour of the world. A brief enumeration of what one of them endured, as narrated in his own words, will give us the truest idea of their situation: "In stripes above measure, in prisons frequent, in deaths oft. Of the Jews five times received I forty stripes save one. Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day I have been in the deep. In journeyings often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils by mine own countrymen

in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; in weariness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness." 2 Cor. xi. 23—27. Such was the treatment the apostles met with; but they do not appear at all disconcerted. Our master, they say, told us of this before. "If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you." John xv. 20. They consider persecution as a thing of course; and go on in their work with unabated zeal. Love to Christ and his cause, appears to burn with a more fervid flame amidst sufferings. Not one of them who had entered on the warfare after their master's death, retires from the field of battle: they all continue in it as long as they breathed the breath of life. Can we account for their conduct on a supposition that they were actuated by impure motives? How much more easy and natural will it be to allow that they were honest, and good, and faithful men.

SECTION VI.

Their Martyrdom, as a Seal to their Testimony.

WHEN men die for opinions, it shews that they are strongly attached to them. When persons of sound judgment and good sense, and in

other respects, of moral rectitude do so, it is a proof that they believe the opinions to be true. But it is proper and necessary to enquire into the foundation of this belief. If it be founded on facts, facts which are palpable, numerous, diversified, important, witnessed to by many, who all agree in the report, and where it was morally impossible they could have been imposed on, their martyrdom is to be considered as the final seal of their testimony. Such *martyrs* were the apostles of Christ; and the facts to which they bore testimony had all the qualities which have been just enumerated.

Had Mahomet died asserting the reality of his visit to heaven on the beast Alborac; and that all the strange things, which he says he heard and saw, were true; the evidence is so slender, that the farthest we could go in assenting to his declarations is, "He *asserted* it to be a fact." But when twelve men inform us that they lived with Jesus upwards of three years, heard his discourses, saw his miracles, were witnesses of his death, were in company with him many times after his resurrection, beheld him ascend to heaven, received the Holy Ghost according to his promise, and were enabled to speak languages which they had never learned, to work miracles, and heal the sick, and raise the dead, (things which they had often performed,) is it possible that they

could be deceived as to the reality and certainty of the facts? The shadow of a doubt cannot remain.

There may have been martyrs of *pride*, who would rather suffer death than give up their sentiments; and who scorned to be compelled to unsay what they had said, and to adopt another's creed, and cast away their own. There have been numerous martyrs of *opinion*, whose death proves nothing more than their sincerity; and that they believed their opinions to be true. How widely do the apostles of Christ differ from both, and rise above both. They may be justly denominated *martyrs of facts*. In matters of opinion there may be a mistake: in matters of absolute fact, there can be none. It is of much weight too, that they were not attached to the belief of these facts by birth, by the prejudices of education, or by their worldly interest. On the contrary, their belief is in opposition to them all; and shocks all their former and early sentiments and habits. What then but the certainty of the facts can present an adequate cause for such unexampled fortitude, in voluntarily submitting to tortures, and the most cruel death. I call it *unexampled* fortitude, for it was accompanied with a holy resignation to the divine will, an unshaken trust in God, and the liveliest hope of blessedness in a future state; and with the most ardent benevolence to their murderers.

expressing itself in the tenderest pity, in declarations of full forgiveness, and in fervent prayers that God would not lay it to their charge, but shew mercy to them, and make them good and happy. Are these men impostors? Are they not “the servants of the living God, who shew unto us the way of salvation?”

SECTION VII.

*It could not be the Design of the Apostles to accomplish
a good End by bad Means.*

WHAT has been said on the testimony of the apostles to the divine mission of Jesus Christ, leaves but one supposition behind; namely, that they had contrived among themselves a religion which they conceived would be in the highest degree for the benefit of mankind; and in order to procure it a readier reception, they pretended that it came from God. Hence they were led to invent miracles and prophecies because these would confer on it greater dignity, and give it more the appearance of a divine origin. As a still greater proof of zeal for the success of their scheme, they endured the bitterest persecution, and devoted themselves to death in its defence; with their last breath proclaiming it true and divine.

But the supposition is directly contrary to all ideas of moral order. To say nothing of the infinite improbability of these men, indeed of any men being able to contrive such a religion and such evidences in its support—the apostles profess to honour God. Their writings and their lives display this in every part. They acknowledge God to be the avenger of all imposture and deceit; and they represent his displeasure as unspeakably dreadful. They particularly reprobate the maxim, “that men may do evil, that good may come,” asserting that “their damnation is just.” And will they expose themselves to it for nought? Will they spend their lives in suffering, and meet death in ignominy and torment, merely to offend God by their presumption? It cannot be:—Some other cause must be assigned.

CHAPTER IV.

OF THE EVIDENCE FOR THE DIVINE AUTHORITY OF THE
NEW TESTAMENT, ARISING FROM SOME ADDITIONAL
CONSIDERATIONS, WHICH FURTHER CONFIRM THE TES-
TIMONY OF THE APOSTLES.

THAT the validity of the testimony of the apostles should be firmly established, must appear to all a matter of the last importance. If the mind have cause of doubt and uncertainty here, other parts of the evidence for christianity will not be listened to with attention and respect. The particulars insisted on in the preceding chapter, must have weight with all by whom they are considered. But there are arguments of an indirect kind which, lying more remote from the view of an impostor, do still more strongly confirm the uprightness of the witnesses of Jesus, and render it utterly improbable, that it was their intention to impose upon the world. The following sections present considerations of this nature: and these, when added to the direct evidence which has been already adduced, give all the assurance of integrity which a candid enquirer will ask; at least, all that is necessary and sufficient to carry conviction to an impartial mind.

SECTION I.

The Improbability of the Apostles contriving a new Religion.

IN the history of the world, I observe many persons attempting to impose on their fellow-creatures, in many ways. Of numerous and fatal impositions, religion, alas! has been the fruitful source: and there is not a system in existence which has not been employed in this way. But to invent a religion for the express purpose, is an infinitely more arduous task, than to make a handle of one already formed. Men have a veneration for an old religion; and all that is requisite is to increase that veneration, and turn it to the advantage of the deceiver: but in the other case, that veneration is to be created;—and there is nothing more difficult.

To suppose that a few obscure mechanics and fishermen of Judea should conceive the idea of forming a new religion which opposed itself to all the world, which was entirely to supersede Judaism, and totally to destroy every species of idolatry, seems far beyond the limits of probability. They had no precedent. The authors of the different systems of pagan mythology were men vested with authority, who had the sword in their hand to give force

to their pretensions ; or they were of singular learning, and unspeakably superior to the barbarous people whom they would persuade to believe what they said ; and they were regarded as oracles.* But for men of inferior stations in society, who had no power and no pretensions to learning, and who were looked down upon as grossly illiterate by the chiefs of their own nation, is quite a different thing. The world had furnished no instance of this before ; nor did history (though it is most probable they were acquainted with no other than the Old Testament) emit one ray of hope of success. The revelation of God's will to the nation of the Jews, by the ministry of Moses, bore no resemblance, and afforded no encouragement to such an attempt. The nature of the christian religion renders the supposition of their attempting it still more unlikely. Do I lay undue stress on this consideration, if I say, It is not probable that such men should conceive such a thing ?

* Perhaps I should not say that they *invented new systems*, for the ground-work and substance of all of them was nearly the same : and as there was a general veneration among the people for received opinions, they took advantage of that, and merely added a few new distinguishing rites and festivals, or altered and modified a particular branch of the old system. In this view, the reasoning acquires still greater weight.

SECTION II.

The Divine Origin of the New Testament may be inferred from the Talents of the Writers.

IF a man put into my hand a weak and superficial treatise in philosophy, and say, "That is a work of Sir Isaac Newton," so soon as I have perused it, I reply, "It is impossible: you are grossly mistaken." On the other hand, if a book be read to me, full of the noblest ideas and the most profound wisdom, far superior to any thing I ever met with; I ask with eagerness, "Who wrote it?" the answer is: "Some boys at school." I wish to see them. They are brought; and I ask, "Is this your writing?" They say, "It is."—"I cannot believe you, for it is not the work of boys: It would do honour to the maturest age."—"You mistake us," they reply, "the writing and style are ours, but the sentiments were dictated to us by our master." This explains the matter at once: What confirms me in the truth of their declaration is, that there are some things which they do not appear fully to understand. All this is natural and easy according to the laws of moral order.

To apply these remarks to the present case, here is a book of a superior kind, which gives the fullest information in every thing that relates

to our highest interests. It was written by some plain illiterate men in Judea; but it leaves all the writings of the ablest philosophers infinitely behind. Compare what it says of God, his nature and government; of man, his duty and happiness; and of a present and future state of being; and you will be convinced. How came these men so far to excel all others? I put the question to the writers of the New Testament. "It is not we that speak," they say, "but the Spirit of the Father which speaketh in us. The language is ours; but the truths were revealed by God. They did not proceed from the energies of our minds: we received them from above." Why will you not believe them? The things revealed are worthy of God. As I observe some things in the book, which they themselves apparently did not fully understand, it renders their account still more probable. If you will not believe them, you are reduced to this difficulty, which is a breach of moral order; namely, that these persons, without education, and without study, wrote a better book than all the ablest men in the world, with all the advantages of learning, have been able to do, either before or since.

SECTION III.

The Penmen of the New Testament wrote with Ease on every Subject.

THERE are some subjects on which it is exceedingly difficult to write: The strongest mind is seen to labour; and the theme to be too great for its energies. The apostles treated the highest and most difficult topics on which men can employ their pens. But their manner fills me with astonishment. They are always at their ease. They never appear embarrassed, or at a loss either for ideas or for words. The necessity they sometimes are under to add expression to expression, in order to convey their ideas fully, is not owing to any defect in their minds, but to the insufficiency of language fully to convey their thoughts. Whether they speak of God or man, of things past or things to come, of Heaven or Hell, of the divine purposes or acts, they appear quite at home, and are fully acquainted with their subject, so far as it should seem they design to treat it.

This is no common attainment; and when we consider who the writers were,—not learned sages, descending from the schools of philosophy, but fishermen from their boats, at the lake of Tiberias; and that in treating the most difficult of all subjects, they discover the hand

of a master drawing his sketch with inimitable ease, what shall we say? At least that they were very extraordinary men. As there were many united in composing the book; and all appear to have possessed this quality in an equal degree, the case is still more remarkable. Let it be thrown into the scale of evidence: it will be found not destitute of weight.

SECTION IV.

The serious Spirit with which the Apostles write, gives Weight to their Testimony.

IT is exceedingly remarkable that men should be able to infuse their spirit into their writings, as we daily feel them do into their conversation. It breathes from their pages upon our minds, and we perceive what manner of men they are. In this quality there is no book which excels the New Testament; and no writers who more clearly display their true character. The image of their souls is stamped upon their hallowed volume. Every attentive reader will observe that their habitual frame in writing is, what I know not better how to express, than by the word *seriousness*. Other authors of those ancient days shew a diversity of temper. Sometimes they are lively, sometimes grave: sometimes we observe seriousness; at other

times levity. But these men of Galilee are always serious and in earnest. They feel the influence of God upon their hearts; they are constantly devout; and their writings breathe the most fervent piety. Not a line escapes them which discovers the absence of reverence for God.

It has been frequently observed, that men who write with the greatest seriousness, are apt to discover a severity of disposition towards others, which has much of the appearance of dislike, or even hatred. But the writers of the New Testament, to the deepest and most constant seriousness unite the purest and most fervent benevolence. Love is never a stranger to their breast. They express the tenderest pity for those who are destitute of just sentiments and dispositions towards God and man; and display, in union with their reverence for God, that exalted spirit of genuine philanthropy which the world had never seen, and which no books written since in similar circumstances have ever displayed. If such men be not faithful witnesses, who are?

SECTION V.

No little or evil Passions are betrayed by the Writers of the New Testament.

WHEN men write histories, or memoirs, or letters, in which they themselves act a consi-

derable part, we see their character and disposition portrayed in the manner in which they speak of themselves, and of others with whom they are connected in the way of intercourse, friendship, or enmity. Persons who have been brought up in simple habits of life, till they ascended the station which displayed them to the world, shew their hearts most openly. Such as have been habituated to the manners of polished society, learn to conceal what the others tell without reserve: but through the veil we can still discern much even of *their* real character and predominant dispositions.

The writers of the New Testament belong to the first class, and display all their soul on the pages of their book. As they were mostly plain men, had they been like others of the same station, we should perceive the giddiness of exaltation to public notice, the pride of authorship, the vanity of success, a contempt of such as differ from them, a hatred of those who reject them, and an undervaluing of qualities which they do not themselves possess. But not one of these little or evil tempers so much as pushes forth a bud. In writing, their only aim is to convey truth. There does not appear a thought of gaining honour to themselves by saying fine things. Though successful beyond conception, not a single expression of self gratulation falls from their lips. "Not I," says one of them, (and he speaks the language of

all,) “but the Grace of God which is in me.” Contempt of others, because weak or wicked, they do not seem to feel: they are full of love and pity for the worst, even for the most inveterate enemies. They give to every good quality its due commendation, whoever may possess it; and to all kinds of useful knowledge their due praise.—Where shall we find such another book?

SECTION VI.

The Humility of the Writers of the New Testament.

PRIDE of knowledge, and pride of goodness, how common are they in books! Compositions of the nature of the New Testament, where the writers are not only the penmen, but also in part the subjects of the history, give peculiar scope for displays of this kind: but we seek for it in vain in the disciples of Christ. Never did authors keep themselves more out of sight, than the writers of the gospels: it is surprising how little is really theirs; and how much comes from the mouths of others. In the course of the narrative they tell their faults with the greatest frankness and *naïveté*. They record without disguise their ignorance, their prejudices, their errors, and their faults. Some writers have told us of their own faults, but in

such a way that we can see their aim is to solicit praise. The language of the heart is, "See what a humble man I am," or "These are all the faults I have: are they not little ones and few?" Nothing of this artifice do the apostles shew. It is honest integrity, simply relating truth; not pride under the mantle of humility fishing for applause.

From their office, as the apostles of Christ, they had great authority in the church. They performed the most wonderful miracles: sickness vanished at their word, and death gave up his prey. By their ministry, disciples were in considerable numbers added to the society of the faithful. How apt are all these things to swell the heart with pride! But the apostles discover nothing of such a spirit. One of them, when compelled to defend his character against the enemies of the cross, enumerates his sufferings and his labours. 2 Cor. xi. But the passage breathes nothing but humility and self annihilation: it seems a torture to him to relate what he had suffered and done in his Master's service. What they say of one part of their office, "we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord, and ourselves your servants for Jesus' sake," is applicable to the whole of their character.

The humility of the apostles appears likewise in recording various particulars in the life of Christ. Men who wished to shine in the rays

of their Master, would have exalted his character to the utmost ; and cast a veil over circumstances and actions which were not so honourable, or which would lead the world to think meanly of him. The writers of the gospels act in a different manner. They relate a multitude of things which might have been concealed from every following age, and which they know would tarnish the character of Jesus with men of worldly minds. The station of his parents, his unlearned education at Nazareth, his rejection by his countrymen, when he appeared in his public character, and their attempt to put him to death for his pretensions, the opposition made to him by his kinsmen, who supposed him to be mad, the continual enmity of the rulers, his condition so destitute that he had not where to lay his head, and his subsisting by the bounty of others, his being accounted a gluttonous man and a wine bibber, a friend of publicans and sinners, in league with Beelzebub, and a demoniac himself, are all told without shame and without disguise. Men who wished either to impose on the world, or to exalt themselves, would not have acted thus. They gave the enemies of the gospel a fair opportunity of examining every charge : and they held themselves up to the world as the disciples of one who was poor, and vilified, and despised. Pride would not have done so. They were clothed with humility.

SECTION VII.

*The Apostles acted as Men believing their Testimony
to be true.*

THE witnesses profess to be fully convinced that Jesus is the Messiah, and that every part of their testimony is true. How they were led to accept the office which called them to deliver this testimony, is not considered as it ought; for it carries much evidence with it.—They were following their occupations in common life, several of them fishermen, one a publican. Christ called to them, “Follow me.” They left all, their homes, their comforts, their prospects: they lived with him as members of his family, and received his doctrine from his lips; and were witnesses of his life, his death, his resurrection, and ascension.

One of the witnesses was a furious and sanguinary bigot, and a persecutor of christianity. We see him depart for Damascus breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of Jesus. But before he arrives at the place, he is stopped in his career: and we find him soon afterwards in the very city where he designed to extirpate the gospel, proclaiming that Jesus is the Christ, and attesting the facts which he had before been doing every thing in

his power to contradict and obliterate. The moral as well as the natural world has its laws: There is an order in both. Men do not throw off their character on a sudden, without cause. They cannot instantly divest themselves of their deep-rooted, their favourite, their strong-grounded prejudices, especially their prejudices of birth, of education, and, least of all, their prejudices of religion. This is applicable to all the apostles, but especially to Paul. Some cause, some adequate cause must have produced in them, and especially in him, so great a change. The history of the planting of christianity in the world records it in Acts ix. and Paul himself, in the xxii. and xxvi. chapters of the same book. Changed he is indeed! His doctrine in Rom. xii. and 1 Cor. xiii. shews him to be a very different man from Saul the zealous Jew, when he rose from the feet of Gamaliel. But what cause shall we assign for the wondrous change? There must have been in them all, and in him, a full conviction that the cause of Jesus was the cause of God.

The manner in which they acted in the discharge of the apostolical office, displays the same spirit of full conviction of the truth of their testimony to Christ. Their Master commanded them to go and teach all nations, "beginning at Jerusalem." They obeyed; and a few weeks afterwards, in the very place where Jesus was crucified, they bore testimony that

he was the Messiah promised to the fathers. Their preaching consisted of an extensive detail of facts relating to Jesus Christ. Had they been conscious of a deception, they would have gone to countries at a distance. They would have declared at Byzantium, at Rome, or at Marseilles, what Jesus had done in Judea and Galilee: and the deception could not have been so easily found out. But by beginning at Jerusalem, they put their doctrine to the test at once. Every inhabitant of that city was qualified to judge, and to decide. Could the apostles have given more convincing evidence, that they believed the truth of the testimony which they bore to Christ?

This will appear with still fuller evidence, if we consider that the apostles preached the gospel in an age, and in places of the greatest knowledge. The Jews were beyond comparison the best informed people in matters of religion: with them they began to deliver their testimony. The Greeks and Romans had made the greatest improvements in arts and sciences, and various literature: to them the apostles afterwards went, and preached in Syria, in the lesser Asia, in Greece, and in Italy. Every where they candidly and fully proposed to the people the gospel of Christ. This has certainly every appearance of fairness; and discovers a consciousness in the apostles, that they were speaking the words of truth;—for if rude tribes

may be easily imposed on, a civilized nation will not believe without evidence. Those only who think they have truth on their side, will act in the manner the apostles did.

SECTION VIII.

The Apostles do not encourage the Prejudices, nor flatter the Passions of Men.

PREJUDICE is one of the grand instruments of human wickedness, and human misery. It is the chain by which the mind is prevented from going in quest of truth. Men have their individual, their professional, their national, and their religious prejudices; and the more agreeable these are to their depraved dispositions, the stronger will they be. Those who wish to gain them, unless they respect their prejudices, can, humanly speaking, expect but little success. The heathen legislators acted on this principle; and we find Mahomet following their example. There is in his system a wonderful degree of accommodation to prejudices. We find something to please the *Jews*, something to win over the *christians*, and something to render his doctrine palatable to the pagan idolators. The apostles encourage *none*: they call men away from them all, as in numberless in-

stances exceeding pernicious; and the least hurtful, as childish follies, unfitting the mind for the reception of truth.

How strong were the prejudices of the Jews in general, and of their different sects! The prejudices of the Gentiles were equally inveterate; and the rulers, the philosophers, the priests, and the multitude, had each their appropriate portion. A man of craft would have tried to attach them all by compliance: or he would have sought to secure a part on his side, and by their means to gain the rest. The apostles attack all; and shew themselves equally hostile to Jewish and Gentile prejudices, without regarding that vast strength which they had acquired by the growth of more than a thousand years. Their design certainly is not to deceive, but to reform: and, instead of supple impostors, we have certainly before us men of staunch unbending integrity.

As they do not respect men's prejudices, they do not *flatter* their vices, and indulge them in their evil *passions*. When men wish to impose on others, they endeavour to enlist their passions on their side, and thus to win over their judgment. Every deceiver, without exception, has made this his aim. But the apostles of Christ know not what *flattery* means: it is not to be found in all the New Testament. While they discover the tenderest pity for guilty and miserable creatures, and shew the utmost conde-

scension to human infirmity, they neither foster men's prejudices, nor give indulgence to any, even the least of their sinful passions.

They do not flatter the *Jews*, but reduce them to a level with the rest of human kind. They do not flatter the Pharisees, to gain the aid of their popularity to the cause of Christ; but accuse them of making the law of God of none effect by their traditions. They do not flatter the Sadducees; but charge them with infidelity and guilt. They do not flatter the *priests*; but address them as blind leaders of the blind. They do not flatter the *multitude*; but call them away from the commission of every sin, to the practice of every duty.

Nor do they flatter the *Gentiles* more than the Jews. They do not seek to ingratiate themselves with the *magistrates*, by a sacrifice of principles, and a support of their measures. They do not seek to win over the *Heathen* priests, by enjoining the people to pay them homage and submission. They court not the patronage of the *philosophers* by adopting the dogmas of their sect: nor do they strive to please the *multitude* by numerous festivals and a pompous ritual. They flatter neither friends nor foes; neither friends to procure their attachment, nor foes to avert their hatred; neither the Jews to gain their countrymen, nor the Gentiles, to allure them into the church.

Are these men impostors? Is it really their

intention to deceive? Will human policy act by this rule? Will it lead its votaries to expect success by such methods as these? There is something here above man. There is here a mode of conduct which must constrain every unprejudiced mind to acknowledge, that this is not the manner of men, when their object is to deceive; and that it presents every appearance of honesty, which words or actions can possibly give.

SECTION IX.

The high Tone of Authority which the Writers of the New Testament use.

To the best judges of human nature, the writers of the New Testament will appear among the humblest of men. But here is a remarkable phenomenon:—these humble men everywhere speak with the commanding tone of divine authority. Other authors who expect belief, reason, or record facts: these sometimes reason, often record facts; but, in addition, they reveal doctrines, and deliver precepts: and in all, demand credit and obedience in the name of God. This is not a paroxysm of pride boiling over for a moment, and then subsiding; not a pretence for dominion, assumed for the oc-

casion, and then laid aside: it runs through the whole. Nor is it the case with one of the writers only, but with all. There is a perfect uniformity of character among them in this respect.

The more I consider this, the more striking it appears. There were eight men concerned in writing the New Testament. They wrote at a distance from each other: several of them, most probably, never saw what the others had done, till they had composed and sent forth their own part. If one, or two, or three of them were men, whose natural temper, or acquired disposition, led them to speak in an authoritative tone, the rest, we might suppose, would have conveyed their ideas in a different manner: but they do not. While there is that diversity in language and expression which may be expected from their various constitutions of mind, they all unite in speaking authoritatively in the name of God; and demand attention and obedience to their words.

There is another striking circumstance connected with this subject. I do not hear one of the writers of this book complain of want of ability; or beg the indulgence of his readers to his errors and imperfections, seeing he had undertaken to treat on subjects so exalted. In other writings this is common. One of the authors of the Apocrypha comes forward with this apology: "If I have done well, and as is

fitting the story, it is that which I desired: but if slenderly and meanly, it is that which I could attain unto." 2 Mac. xv. 38. There is scarcely a preface to a treatise on a difficult theme, which does not crave the indulgence of the reader. But there is nothing of this in the New Testament: yet never was there a book which so totally annihilated the writers, and displayed men so void of pride. How shall we account for persons so humble, employing so authoritative a tone?—Let the deist reflect upon it.

SECTION X.

The Character in which the Founder and first Teachers of Christianity appeared.

WHEN a new religion is propagated, it is desirable that men should have the fairest opportunity of examining its claims. Much will depend on the situation in which those who propagate it appear. Superior rank, and exalted station, or an office of authority, have all a tendency to dazzle the mind, and to impede a full examination.—Vespasian is said to have performed miracles. Had the emperor deigned to ask me to inquire into the reality of his wonders, I would have replied, with the philoso-

pher to one of his successors: "I do not love to contend with the man who has five and twenty legions at his command!"—Mahomet was the *caliph* as well as the prophet; and as soon as he could find disciples to compose a *banditti*, he put arms into their hands, and appeared at their head: and the terrestrial theocracy which he made it his business to establish, presented both himself and his successors in the garb of a sultan, and a commander of armies. I do not like to examine the claims of the prophet's religion, while his *sword* and his *spear* glitter in mine eyes, and offend my sight; and his frowning aspect reddens at my doubts. If integrity be not dearer to me than life; I say, "I believe: enrol me among the faithful." The legislators among the ancient pagans were placed in the same situation. As soon as the people received their code, and yielded to their dominion, all the power of the state was in their hands.

"Rex Anius, rex idem hominum, Phœbique sacerdos."

VIRGIL.

Anius, who is not only the priest of Apollo, but the king of men, may bid me examine his system, and satisfy myself as to its truth, which, he says, is evident to all. But I look around, and I perceive the lictors and the dungeon,—which are not favourable to free inquiry. Endeavouring to conceal my fears, I turn to

him and say, " King Anius, urgent business calls me away, I pray thee have me excused."

From these let us turn to the founder of christianity. Jesus appeared among the Jews as a private person, in no outward splendour, and vested with no civil authority. " Who made me a judge or a divider among you?" said he to a man who wished him to interfere in settling some domestic disputes. All his influence arose from his wisdom, his goodness, and his divine power. " My kingdom," he replied to Pilate, " is not of this world."—The apostles resembled their Master. They had no commission from any of the kings of the earth. They were private citizens, unconnected with the great; and plain men, strangers to the address of the courtier, and the man of fashion. They were connected with none of the rulers of the world, in order to acquire influence. They knew nothing of them, but when they were dragged before their tribunals to answer for their doctrine, and their conduct. Nor had they learnt the seduction of human eloquence. Most of them shew by their writings, that they were strangers to it, and incapable of its fascinating arts. But as is evident from the New Testament, they brought forward their system with all plainness and simplicity; and presented it to their hearers for their consideration and reception. Men might object, or express their difficulties and their doubts, without fear of in-

jury on that account. Could any method be more favourable for mankind than this? If the apostles acquired any influence over the minds of others, it must have arisen from their unaffected goodness, integrity, and benevolence; not from the imposing power of external circumstances, or from cunning craftiness. I appeal to thee, O Deist, was not the world fairly treated as to the manner of the introduction of christianity; and had not men the fullest opportunity of examining its pretensions?

CHAPTER V.

OF THE EVIDENCE FOR THE DIVINE AUTHORITY OF THE
NEW TESTAMENT, ARISING FROM MIRACLES.

WHEN persons profess to be the messengers of a revelation from God, whether in speech or writing, it is natural to ask, “What evidence do you produce for so high a claim?” They may say, “We are conscious to ourselves that we are inspired of God to declare his will to men, and we cannot doubt it.”—But though this satisfies you, it does not satisfy my mind: it may be evidence to you, but it is none to me. If God give a revelation of his will, he will give evidence of this, not only to those whom he commissions to publish it, but to those whom he commands to receive it. This is but reasonable; and its reasonableness christianity acknowledges.

Mahomet was able to produce no satisfactory external evidence of a divine mission. His kinsman Ali’s reply to him is remarkable. “O prophet, whosoever rises against thee, I will dash out his teeth, tear out his eyes, break his legs, rip up his belly.” By such forcible arguments did the religion of the Koran make its way in the world. Had any of the writers of the New Testament spoken thus, an impartial jury would give a verdict instantly against them, and dismiss the cause. But like honest

men, conscious of the validity of their mission, they lay before us their credentials ; and intreat us to examine them with attention.

In addition to the proofs arising out of the nature of the truths revealed, and the other consideration which have been noticed, they produce two kinds of evidence for our satisfaction ; the one exhibiting a display of divine power, the other, a manifestation of divine knowledge and wisdom ; or, in other words, **MIRACLES** and **PROPHECIES**. More convincing proofs of God's interfering in an extraordinary manner to seal a commission from himself, it will be difficult to produce. Miracles were confined to the age of those who laid claim to inspiration : they introduced the gospel to mankind ; but the evidence of them descends in the form of testimony, from generation to generation. Prophecy, where it has respect to a course of events, increases the evidence from age to age, by the accomplishment of particular predictions.

These two branches have this in their favour, that they have approved themselves to the general judgment of mankind : for when any person pretended to a divine commission, the usual proof was a miracle, or a prediction. Whatever credit might be due to the claim, the kind of proof was looked upon to be good. Let us consider the validity of those adduced in favour of christianity,—and in this chapter take a view of the miracles.

SECTION I.

The Possibility and Existence of the Miracles of the New Testament.

ALMIGHTY power is that perfection of the Supreme Being which most generally and forcibly strikes the minds of men. An extraordinary display of it on objects within the reach of our observation, furnishes one of the most satisfactory evidences of divine revelation. This display we call a miracle. "There can be no such thing as a miracle," some have loudly cried, "because the Deity has established certain laws by which he maintains an inviolable order in the universe, and which cannot be broken through." Let it be remembered that this is *assertion*, and *not proof*. That miracles are possible, none will deny, who believe the existence and perfections of God. Nor are they improbable. He who for valuable purposes established these laws, for valuable ends can suspend them: and what is there contrary either to reason or sound philosophy to maintain, that it is highly probable, that God will suspend the laws of the *natural* world, in order to accomplish the most noble and important purposes in the *moral* world; namely, his own glory, and the reformation and highest happiness of mankind? Here is certainly an

end worthy of God, and productive of the most beneficial effects in the order and state of the universe. Were it merely to excite wonder, to gratify curiosity, or to answer some inferior purpose, philosophy might argue against them; but it cannot with effect, when so valuable an end is intended, and promoted by them. Besides, who can say that it was not a part of God's plan, a section in the divine constitution, that at certain seasons, and on certain occasions, the laws of nature should be suspended, and miracles wrought. Ordinary regulations are adapted to the ordinary course of things: extraordinary events require and warrant extraordinary interpositions and exertions.

SECTION II.

The Number, Variety, and Manner of the Miracles performed in Confirmation of the Christian Religion.

IF only one or two miracles had been wrought to confirm the truth of christianity, it might have been considered as a fortunate chance, which occurred at a convenient season. But the NUMBER was very great. Above fifty different instances occur in the gospels, of Christ's miraculous exertions; and of consequence the opportunities of examination were increased,

and of deceit proportionably lessened. Besides, in one scene of miracles, hundreds were healed of different diseases; and thousands fed with a few loaves and fishes.

There was likewise a considerable VARIETY in the miracles of the New Testament. Had they been only of one or two kinds, it might have been said, that the persons had some peculiar skill in performing these cures, or a peculiar art of imposing on men in respect to them. But so various are the miracles, that this objection cannot be adduced. Not one disease only, but all are subject to the power of Christ and his apostles: not only diseases, but lameness, blindness, dumbness, deafness, and other evils incident to humanity are banished by their word: not only every calamity which is the lot of the living, but death itself is obedient to them, and gives up his prey at their command. Not only man, but every other being bows in ready subjection to their voice. Not only living, but inanimate creatures feel the power of Jehovah, and act contrary to their natures at his will: The winds, the waves, the rocks, the earth, the sun, the heavens, all are the subjects of miraculous exertions in those who first introduced the christian dispensation. Every thing was obedient to their word; for Jehovah invested them with his power.

The MANNER in which these miracles were

wrought, also merits notice. The operations of nature are in general slow ; almost always gradual : the miracles of the gospel were generally instantaneous ; but the effects were lasting, and men might for years afterwards see them, and receive the report of those who had been fed, or healed, or raised from the dead. All were welcome to partake of the benefit of them ; and no distinction was made between the rich and the poor. The only exception was, they would not work miracles to gratify curiosity, nor sanction unbelief. They were performed in the most public manner : multitudes were present. If on some occasions most of the persons were attached to Christ, others were done before the most inveterate enemies of the gospel, and extorted their belief, and attestation. There was great authority in Christ's manner ; but it was entirely free from ostentation : and there was a remarkable sobriety, decorum, and dignity in his miracles, and in the attending circumstances. They display something above the ordinary character of man.

SECTION III.

*The Design of the Miracles recorded in the
New Testament.*

CHRIST and his apostles sought not fame by their miracles : not one was performed to procure admiration. They all arose naturally out of occasions which presented themselves in the course of their ministry ; and were acts of evident utility. The heathen miracles are so detached from the history, that they may be taken out, and it remains entire. But the miracles of Christ spring naturally out of the narrative of his life, and form an essential part of it ; and cannot be taken away without rending in pieces the whole. They are likewise highly beneficial ; but not to the persons who performed them : for they had not in view either their advantage or their ease. Christ and his apostles did no miracle to satisfy their own hunger, or to avert any danger to which they were exposed. In subordination to the honour of God, the benefit of others was the great object in view.

The miracles of the gospel gave a bright display of power, sanctity, and goodness ; and the design was to establish the belief of the divine government, by dispensing acts of be-

neficence to men ; to teach them what kind of being their Creator is ; and by sealing their commission from him, to introduce with proper evidence a system of divine truth, calculated in the highest degree to advance the honour of God, and the improvement and happiness of the human race. To give power to work miracles for trifling ends, may well be considered as unbecoming the divine character ; but to do so, in order to introduce a religion which is to promote the happiness of the universe through eternity, is *nodus Deo vindice dignus*.

In speaking of the design of the miracles of the New Testament, it is of importance to mention, that they were the subjects of prophecy long before, Isaiah xxxv. 5, 6. ; and the Messiah was described by this particular mark : “that by him the eyes of the blind should be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped.” Christ appeals to his miracles as the seal of his commission, and as an incontestible proof that he came forth from God. John v. 36, 37. “But I have greater witness than that of John : for the works which the Father hath given me to perform, the same works that I do bear witness of me, that the Father hath sent me. And the Father himself, which hath sent me, hath borne witness of me.” John xiv. 11. “Believe me that I am in the Father, and the Father in me : or else believe me for the very works’ sake.”

SECTION IV.

The Time and Place of the Miracles of the New Testament considered as furnishing Evidence in favour of Christianity.

IF there were miracles in every age, they would, in a great measure, lose their nature, and cease to be evidence. We may, therefore, naturally expect that a particular season will be chosen for the display of them: and, on examination, we may perceive the wisdom and goodness of God manifested in the choice.

When the system of the universe was framed, a multitude of miracles, or extraordinary exertions of almighty power was necessary, before these laws of nature which now exist, could begin to run their course. In like manner, at the commencement of a divine revelation, miracles are necessary, or at least expedient, to set the moral machine in motion, and to give it the impulse that is sufficient to continue its motion by the aid of ordinary means, which, in the moral world, answer the same purposes as the laws established in the natural world.

On a minute investigation, other reasons appear, which display more fully the fitness both

of the time and place of miracles. There was a nation, or rather one *great family*, which God had selected for the purpose of preserving those divine truths which were preparatory to that grand revelation, which was to lay the foundation of the future felicity of the world. To miracles they were not strangers. Moses wrought them, and other eminent prophets: and it was predicted by them that the Messiah would in still greater abundance. Among this people Jesus arose, and performed his wonderful works, and gave them the fullest opportunity of examining his character. Among them too, the apostles first began their ministry, accompanied with many notable miracles. From thence they went to the gentiles, and presented the same evidence to them, confirming their doctrine by these supernatural acts, which manifested the hand of God to be with them.

It will be difficult to conceive a state of things in which miracles could be wrought, that was more favourable for the investigation of them. There appears a fitness, that the evidence should be first presented to this great family of the Jews, whilst they dwelt together. By their freedom from gross superstition, and their superior acquaintance with divine principles, they were best qualified to judge. At the same time, as the manner of Christ's appearance shocked their prejudices, and destroyed all their hopes of worldly domination and national superiority,

they would examine their reality with eagles' eyes. As they were afterwards to be dispersed over the face of the earth, they would carry the confutation of christianity with them, if in their power. By this arrangement, the gentiles had miracles wrought among them also, in the most enlightened age of antiquity, and in every country where the apostles preached the gospel. The enemies of christianity had hereby an opportunity of combining their enquiries with men in other parts of the Roman empire, and of the civilized world: and gentiles might call in the aid of the Jews dispersed among them. So evident are the advantages which result from the time and place, where miracles in support of christianity were performed.

SECTION V.

Evidence of the Reality of the Miracles of the New Testament.

“BUT I give no credit to miracles,” says a deist. This may be an act of *reason*, or it may not. God never requires us to believe without evidence: but where sufficient evidence is given, he is highly and justly displeased at men's

unbelief. Miracles are capable of proof, just as well as other events which take place in the ordinary course of nature. An eastern king, when a Dutch ambassador told him that water congealed in Holland, and bore men and horses and waggons, replied in anger, "It is false and impossible, for no such thing was ever seen in Siam." But the congealing of water in Holland can be proved just in the same way, and with as much force, as its remaining in a liquid state in Siam. Like many opposers of christianity, the monarch in the torrid zone forgot that the experience of one man, in one country, or one age, is not the experience of every man, in every country, and in every age; and that what one has not seen and accounts impossible, another may have seen, and can testify to be certain. The idea of the proof of miracles being impossible, is absurd. All that is required, is evidence, sufficient evidence: and where the thing testified is of an extraordinary nature, the greater degree of evidence may be necessary; and in a revelation from God may be required. The expectation is reasonable: let the rule be applied to miracles. Demand sufficient evidence to satisfy a reasonable man: it will be found, for God is not only just but good.

A miracle, to those who see it, is an object of sense. To those who have not seen it, the evidence must arise from testimony, the testi-

mony of the person who performed the miracle, the testimony of them on whom it was performed, or the testimony of the people who were eye witnesses of it. All these may be combined with such force in the confirmation of a miracle, that if their united testimony be rejected, we can have no certainty of any thing whatever. There are no ancient events which have such a weight of evidence in their favour, as the miracles of Christ and his apostles. We have the union of all the three kinds of proof which have been just mentioned. The apostles who wrought miracles, bear testimony both by solemn declarations before their enemies, and by written documents: and what credit is due to their testimony an investigation of their character will shew. There is also the evidence of the persons on whom the miracles were wrought, as in the instance of the man born blind, who was restored to sight by Christ himself, John ix. and of the lame man who was healed by Peter and John, Acts iii. But the testimony of the eye-witnesses is perhaps the most remarkable of all. Thousands who saw the miracles, embraced the gospel, and exposed themselves to the hatred of the world, and persecution; and many of them endured a cruel death. Would they suffer all these on purpose to support a falsehood? It is contrary to the moral order of the universe. In short, here is a miracle, at any rate. He who denies

the miracles of the New Testament, must allow one which is equally great, namely, that some invisible agent so deranged the minds of thousands, and so confounded and perverted their operations, that men who, in all other matters, conducted themselves with reason and judgment, acted here in direct opposition to all the governing principles of human nature; to duty, to integrity, to interest, to honour, to happiness; and all this merely to support a falsehood. The testimony thus given, was not contradicted by the enemies of the gospel who lived at the time: reason must therefore conclude, they had nothing to say against it.

SECTION VI.

A Review of some particular Miracles of the New Testament.

MORE fully to establish, or rather to display the certainty of the miracles of the New Testament, a particular consideration of them is earnestly recommended. I instance in the three following by way of specimen.

The ninth chapter of John's gospel records the history of a man *born blind*, whom Jesus restored to sight. He is brought before the pha-

risees, the mortal enemies of Christ and of his cause. He is interrogated, threatened, cast out of the synagogue. But after you have attentively surveyed every particular, observe the result of the whole. They cannot adduce one circumstance in the way of confutation.

There is another instance, in the case of a man *lame from his birth*, whom the Apostles healed, Acts iii. They are dragged to the tribunal of the ecclesiastical rulers. They are closely questioned respecting the matter. They assert the reality of the miracle. They declare that it was in the name of Jesus of Nazareth, that the man was made whole,—that Jesus whom *they* had crucified. What discoveries do the chief priests make? The apostles are in their hands. The man who had been lame, is standing by. They are vested with full power as magistrates, to take cognizance of the matter. If there be deceit, it must be detected. But no discovery is made; and immediately afterwards five thousand Jews embrace the gospel.

But the most remarkable miracle of all is the *resurrection* of Jesus Christ. Peruse the history with care; and you must conclude either that he rose, or that his disciples stole the body away. The last, the more it is considered, the more improbable it appears. Jesus had declared, that he would rise again on the third

day. The heads of the Jewish nation knew this, and determined to prevent any craft or force being employed by his followers, to take the body from the tomb, and then pretend that he was risen. A stone is rolled to the mouth of the sepulchre; a seal is fixed upon it, and a guard of Roman soldiers set. Will the timid disciples who ran away when their master was seized, now attack a band of armed men; or could they hope to carry off the body secretly? What is more improbable?—Besides, if they had reason to think their master had deceived them, and filled their minds with false expectations; instead of running any risk to get the body into their possession, they would rather have renounced all connection with him for ever. Had they even stolen away the body as was said, that would have entirely cooled the ardour of their affection, and have banished the enthusiasm of love from their breasts, never to return. But their future lives, by the ardent fervour of their affectionate zeal, still more strongly confute the supposition.

It is evident the body is gone. The apostles describe the resurrection of their master; and assert that he appeared to them on the very day he rose, and frequently afterwards. Read the soldiers' account, Matt. xxviii. Observe the conduct of the rulers. Why do they not order the apostles to be seized? Why do they not command the soldiers to be punished? Why

do they not bring the whole to a juridical determination? Why is this neglect in men, who had been so anxious to have a guard placed on the sepulchre? On the supposition of the resurrection of Jesus, the whole is natural and easy: on a supposition that the disciples came and stole the body away, every thing is inexplicable.—In short, the more attentively every miracle is examined, the stronger evidence it will be found to contain. Will it be said, “The apostles had the writing of their own story, and the telling of their own tale?” But does not the success of the gospel plainly shew, that their account could not be contradicted nor disproved? In fact, what contradiction of this miracle do the writings of the adversaries of the gospel contain? what proof that the resurrection of Jesus did not take place*?

Lay these things together, and let them be duly weighed: it is impossible but that they

* The silence of Josephus on the subject, and of Philo, and of the earliest writers, after the publication of the gospel, is a very singular circumstance; and gives reason to conclude, that they could not deny the reality of the miracles of Christ, and durst not attempt the refutation of the Gospels and Acts of the Apostles, nor the vindication of the rulers and priests from the charges of black and complicated guilt, which were brought against them by the followers of Jesus.

must have weight with a considerate mind. The miracles of Christ and his apostles were published all around, as soon as they were performed. They were committed to the page of history, in the same age, in the same country, and for the inspection of the same people among whom they were wrought. They were likewise immediately acted upon both by friends, and by foes. Had there been any deception, it was easy to discover it: and soon discovered it must have been, because the most important consequences depended on the discovery. Here is evidence of a superior kind; and the world can produce nothing like it. The stories of miracles recorded several hundreds of years after they were performed, and at a distance from the scene of action, such as those of Pythagoras, and Apollonius of Tyana, and in Livy's history, will not bear a comparison, are unworthy of attention for a moment, and have not even probable evidence in their support. Some have expressed themselves lightly concerning miracles, as if it were an easy thing to lay claim to them; and success were not difficult: but they did not derive these sentiments from the history of mankind. Where a system is established, its votaries may pretend to miracles in order to support its influence; and being surrounded by those who are as much attached to it as themselves, they may succeed in the imposture. But produce an instance in

the page of history, of persons introducing a new religion which was in direct opposition to all those already established, and offering miracles as the evidence that the religion was from God? Here, after Moses, christianity stands alone: and the world does not present another example of the kind. However much any might have been disposed to make the trial, they felt the difficulty, and shrunk back. The apostles of Christ advance boldly to the field. Multitudes see the miracles, embrace the gospel, change not only their sentiments, but their habits, and their conduct; and suffer death on its account. Its enemies have left nothing on record, that has the shadow of an argument against its truth, or of an objection to its divine authority.

CHAPTER VI.

OF THE EVIDENCE FOR THE DIVINE AUTHORITY OF THE
NEW TESTAMENT, ARISING FROM PROPHECY.

WHETHER miracles or prophecies furnish the strongest evidence for the truth of revelation it may not be easy to determine. Each has its advantages. Miracles, at the time they are wrought, carry deep conviction of the power of God displayed in favour of the truth. We frequently perceive this effect in the spectators, when Christ gave sight to the blind, and health to the diseased: they were astonished, they were amazed, they glorified God. On the other hand, the fulfilment of prophecy which has been pregnant with the event for ages, and at last travails in birth, and brings forth, must strike every observer with equal force, though in a different way; and manifests the divine foreknowledge and wisdom bearing witness, that the religion, which it was designed to confirm, is from God. When the two are united, what stronger external evidence can we conceive!

That the gospel can boast of its miracles has been shewn: it has *prophecies* likewise to bring forward in support of its claims; and not mere-

ly one or two insulated predictions, but a vast body, connected in its parts, stretching through scores of centuries, and calling our attention to the most striking and prominent features of particular events. "But there have been many impostures in this way," the enemy of the gospel objects. It is granted; but what does it prove? If a person declares that an event has taken place, which never took place, is it a proof that no declaration concerning any event which is past, is worthy of credit? It is just the same with respect to events which are to come. Besides, false pretences to a thing furnish a strong presumption that there are somewhere just claims. There would be no counterfeit, were there no sterling money. Let the subject of prophecy be candidly weighed.

SECTION I.

The Character of the Prophets.

THE men, whom God has employed as instruments in providence, for accomplishing his designs, by changes among the nations of the earth, have often been the vilest of human kind. But when he has commissioned persons to act as his servants in revealing his will, and calling

sinner to repentance and subjection, they have always been both like himself and their commission, wise and holy men. Such, on examination, will the character of the prophets, both of the Old Testament and of the New, be found. If writings (and the description is confined to such as wrote a portion of these hallowed volumes) can furnish evidence of the intellectual and moral qualities of the authors, the palm of eminent wisdom and goodness must be given them. There is a superiority to evil principles and selfish ends. That they did not exercise the office for gain, is evident from the nature of their predictions. These were very often such as to be calculated to procure injuries instead of benefits; and a prison and death, instead of a life of ease and affluence. They did not, like the false prophets, flatter nobles and princes, and prophesy smooth things to sooth their passions, and confirm them in their ways; but frankly told the plain truth, when they knew it would be disagreeable in the extreme, and would endanger their own safety. Fame was not their object: they never sought it: and we seldom find them in courts or among the great, but to tell unpalatable truths. They had not the spirit of the world; nor did they view the scenes they exhibit with worldly eyes. Insensible to the charms of greatness, power, and earthly joys, they regard every object which is presented before

them, only as it has respect to God, and man's subjection to him: for the honour of God, the kingdom of Christ, and the highest happiness of men are evidently the objects which bear sway within their hearts, and govern their conduct. They have occasion to mention all kinds of persons and things, and to represent all kinds of events: but it is easy to perceive that they are affected with them, only as they are connected with the grand system of the divine government, and as hindering or advancing the moral improvement of mankind.

SECTION II.

The Nature, Minuteness, and Extent of Prophecy.

THERE have been many instances of men foretelling events; and according to their conjecture they have taken place: this has been sometimes the effect of accident, sometimes of superior sagacity. Hence the opposers of christianity have been ready to consider the prophecies in no higher light. But a little attention will discover an immense difference. A naked event may be frequently foreseen, as the effect of an existing, operating cause. But the prophets record events with considerable

minuteness : circumstances are appended : the persons, the cause, the effect, the manner, the time, the place, make a part of the prediction. This wholly alters the case : and it is ten thousand to one, if the man who conjectured aright as to the mere event would have succeeded, had these formed a part of his narrative.

The things predicted are likewise of such a *nature* as to bid defiance to human conjecture. Some of them were novel in their kind, some uncommon, many improbable ; not a few, the very reverse of what might be expected to take place ; and some, as the resurrection and ascension of Christ, and the pouring out of his spirit, were supernatural. Many of the events were of so contingent, and some of so improbable a nature, that the foresight of them exceeds the greatest human sagacity. It belongs to God alone, and to those whom he inspires.

The *extensive* range of prophecy raises it still higher above the powers of man. Were but a few events predicted ; were they comprized within a small space ; and were they unconnected with each other, the evidence would be less strong. The heathen oracles had no system. An insulated event now and then took place according to the response : but there was no important object in view : no whole, of which these formed a part. How different is the scene before us ! The number of events is exceedingly great. The space of

time which they occupy, is immense: they stretch through some thousand years. As to place, they spread over the face of the whole earth, as the scene of fulfilment. Instead of an unconnected mass, there is a regular chain of events, related to, and connected with each other, and forming one grand whole. In short, prophecy forms a succinct previous history, of the destinies of the human race: it notes down with distinctness the most memorable æras; and describes, with characters strongly marked, the divine dispensations of judgment and mercy.

Prophecy, in this view, acquires a wonderful accession of evidence. If men may conjecture some near and insulated events depending on causes which already exist, it is utterly impossible for any but those who are taught of God, to foretell so extensive and complicated a plan, where many of the causes were not, at the time of the prediction, brought into existence: nor could human or even angelic sagacity foresee that they ever would exist.

SECTION III.

The Design of Prophecy.

To be able to gratify curiosity, feeds the pride of the human heart. To display qualities which others do not possess, in order to acquire superiority, and to be admired, is exceedingly natural to man. But how remote are these things from the spirit and design of the holy prophets! In pretences to prophecy among the heathens, all the object of the enquirer was to have curiosity gratified, or to render the answer subservient to the pursuits of ambition, avarice, or pleasure: and if the person pretending to divination or oracular responses had any object beyond the reward presented by the enquirer, it was merely to produce admiration, and give credit to a gainful imposture. But the prophets of the scriptures have infinitely higher ends in view. To confirm the truth and authority of a revelation, to give more exalted views of God, to produce faith in the Saviour, to create submission to the divine will, to excite to perseverance in the service of God, to communicate support under sufferings for religion, to console christians amidst the rage and enmity of the world, and to justify the

ways of God to man, is the design of their predictions: and who can say but that it is a design worthy of men who came with a commission from God?

That *unity* of design in the doctrines and scope of the gospel which appears in the writers of the New Testament, might well be urged as a forcible argument in support of the general question. It is here adduced only in confirmation of the prophecies of scripture. This connected chain of events, this previous history of future times is the more remarkable, as the prophets lived in different countries and in different ages. When men live all in one place, it may be said they have conspired to impose on the world, by inventing a tale in which they all may agree. But as to the prophets who preceded Christ's coming, many could have no connexion with the others. Each however, performs the part assigned him by heaven: and we see the stone which he has polished, exactly fit the place it was designed for in the building, and give enlargement, strength, and beauty to the whole. None of them are copyists. While they speak (as is often the case) of the same thing, it is with some additional circumstances; and each has something new to predict, which was made known to him alone.

SECTION IV.

The Degree of Clearness in Prophecy.

COMPLAINTS have been made of the darkness and uncertainty of prophecy; but do they not arise from not duly considering its manner and design? The *language* is assigned as one cause of its obscurity: the *indistinctness of representation* as another. With what reason shall be seen.

As prophecy is a peculiar species of writing, it is natural to expect a peculiarity in the language it makes use of. Sometimes it employs *plain terms*, but most commonly *figurative signs*. It has symbols of its own, which are common to all the prophets: but it is not to be considered on this account as a riddle. The symbols are derived from the works of creation and providence, from the history of the Jews, and of the nations with which they were most closely connected, or by which they were most violently opposed. These symbols have their rules of interpretation as uniform, and as certain as any other kind of language: and whoever applies his mind with patience and attention to the subject, will be able to understand the general scheme of prophecy, and the colour of events foretold, whether prosperous or calamitous; though he may be utterly unable

to discover to what person, or precise time and place, they are to be applied.

Complaint has likewise been made of want of clearness in prophecy, from an indistinct representation of the event. But yet let it be remembered, that if some prophecies be obscure, others are clear. The latter furnish a proof of the inspiration of the scriptures; the former contain nothing against it. The obscurity is in many instances accounted for from the extensive grasp of prophecy. Some predictions were to have their accomplishment in the early ages of the church; and were peculiarly designed for the benefit of the *first* christians. These were on that account more plain. There were other predictions designed for the benefit of those who lived in the *middle* ages. To the first christians these were obscure: but when the time advanced toward their accomplishment, the veil was gradually drawn aside; and they were more clearly seen, and better understood. Another class of predictions looked forward to the *latter* ages of the church. These appeared obscure both to the first christians, and to those who lived in the middle ages; but when that generation appeared, for whose use it was the will of heaven they should be left on record, light began to shine upon them; and the minds of men were awakened to look out for the accomplishment, in some great events, which would display the glory of

God, and advance the happiness of his servants. The obscurity of many prophecies will be accounted for in this way.

Another reason for throwing a veil over the face of prophecy, whether by its peculiar symbols, or a dark representation, will appear by considering the nature of the subject. Some of the events foretold are of such a nature, that the fate of nations depends upon them; and they are to be brought into existence, by the instrumentality of men. Had plain language or clear description been employed, the friends of christianity would have endeavoured to accomplish them, by means used with this express design. On the other hand, its enemies would have exerted every nerve in order to prevent the accomplishment. In the present form of prophecy, men are left in these matters entirely to themselves; and fulfil the prophecies without intending, or thinking, or knowing that they do so. The accomplishment strips off the veil; and the evidence of prophecy appears in all its splendour. How much wiser God's methods are, than man's would be!

SECTION V.

The Prophecies concerning Christ.

LET those who assert predictions to be fortunate conjectures, stop for a moment and seri-

ously consider the prophecies of the Old Testament (the first volume of this book, and of equal authority, as may be afterwards shewn,) concerning the Messiah. Perhaps there may be an hundred passages or more, each containing somewhat distinct and peculiar in the description of his character: a character in which are many things very remarkable, and some apparently contradictory: see particularly Isaiah liii. They were recorded by different men, in different countries, and in different ages: and the last, some centuries before his appearance. Christians say, that all these predictions relate to Jesus Christ. The matter is capable of accurate examination. History, sacred and profane, furnishes us with a number of heroes, warriors, statesmen, kings, sages, and philosophers. Apply the prophecies to any of them you please. Take Judas, or Peter, or John, or Herod: or go to profane history: take Alexander or Cæsar; or, if you think it will answer better, take Confucius, Socrates, or Marcus Antoninus. Apply to any of them the prophecies of the Old Testament. If one particular suits, a second does not: a third renders it evident, that not one of them is the man designed. Apply them to Christ; apply all the hundred or more; an astonishing correspondence appears: every one fits him: there is not a single prediction which is discordant. He that will call this *chance*,

and ascribe the agreement merely to fortuitous circumstances, is not ~~fit~~ to be argued with; and must not say that christians alone are *credulous*.

There is a circumstance peculiarly striking, which we should not pass over; namely, that the predictions concerning Christ, are all in the keeping of his *enemies*. Had the disciples of Jesus been the sole guardians of the sacred books, it might be said, that they altered them to make the prophecy accord with the event. But the Jews are the keepers, the jealous keepers of the ancient prophets: and their hatred to Christ and his cause is at least as strong, as their veneration for the prophets of their nation. Ask them for the book; they will give it you, and curse Jesus of Nazareth. But read it, and you will find a perfect agreement between the prediction and the event, in the character of Christ; and that it is not without sufficient reason we believe, that Jesus is the true Messiah promised of old.

SECTION VI.

The Destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans.

THERE are three examples peculiarly striking, which I shall present to view from the New

Testament: one is near the time of the prediction: the second remote by many centuries: the third holding forth the light of its evidence from the age of the prophecy to the present hour, with this difference only, that the light grows clearer and stronger as we advance in the journey: the star is become a sun. Thus, men in every age have a prophecy in actual fulfilment to support their faith. Let us begin with the first, the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans.

A mere general declaration that an event will take place, deserves not much attention, nor furnishes much evidence. It may come to pass, although the prediction has no higher origin than human sagacity, or even bold conjecture. But the case is widely different, when time, place, circumstances, persons engaged, causes and effects are particularly delineated: all these enter into the prophecy before us.

The event itself was improbable, for Jerusalem was already in the hands of the Romans; and there was no likelihood that the Jews would drive them away. Though they felt sore under the Roman yoke, their state presented nothing like the power of shaking it off. Few instances are on record of cities in that age so totally destroyed. The slaughter of the inhabitants far exceeded what ordinarily took place. The particular circumstances of the siege, the

causes which protracted it, the reasons of the fearful loss of lives which ensued, the miseries which spread over the land, the depopulation of the country in general, the degradation of the survivors to personal slavery, and the scattering of them over the face of the earth, these, no human wisdom could foresee: and all was to take place before that generation should pass away.

As the prediction was remarkable, so was the accomplishment. Were I to send you to a christian writer for information on the point, you might say, "Zeal for his religion has filled his book with pious frauds, to make the event accord with the prediction." I rejoice that I can send you to a Jew: an enemy of the gospel shall be your oracle. Josephus's history of the wars of his countrymen with the Romans, contains a full account of the fate of his nation: and he was well qualified for writing it, for he was deeply concerned in the work, and bore a public office. Do not take a christian's word for the fulfilment; but read the Jewish record and compare it with the prediction of Christ, in the gospel by Matt. xxiii. 38. xxiv. and Luke xxi. If you be earnest in wishing to know the true religion, that you may attain eternal happiness, you will not think the labour too great.

That the evidence may appear in all its lustre, observe the minute circumstances on which

the war depended, the fortuitous events which produced it, the casual occurrences which contributed to its extent and continuance, the rising passions at the moment which gave a turn to affairs, the objects appearing in view which suggested further plans, the purposes formed in consequence of existing circumstances, and the unpremeditated acts of obscure individuals which led to the most important consequences. To produce the final catastrophe in its full extent, these all combined, and all were necessary : and these, none but God could foresee, and none but God's servants predict.

SECTION VII.

The Prophecies concerning Antichrist.

WHAT christianity was in its origin, read the New Testament and see. There appears a system of truth taught by unassuming men with all humility ; a system of infinite simplicity as to outward forms ; to be propagated without force and compulsion ; and containing no other tie but that of brotherly love : a system, the ministers employed in teaching which, were to have no authority, but what arose from the voluntary subjection of men to the doctrine of

Christ: not what the ministers declared to be so; but what they themselves were satisfied was so, from their own examination and conviction.

The prediction mentioned above delineates a state of things as widely different as night from day. It represents a system or power arising in the christian church in direct opposition to its genius, tendency, and spirit; the very antipode of the gospel. That christianity would be corrupted in a course of time, was no improbable conjecture: and the mere declaration that such an event would take place, could confer no claim to the gift of prophecy. But such a prediction as this concerning Anti-christ, surpasses all human foresight. Conjecture could not have stretched her wings so far. Besides, the numerous distinguishing characters, causes, effects, and circumstances of this strange phænomenon are so minutely delineated, that the divine foreknowledge alone could have drawn the picture. See the description in 2 Thess. ii. 1 Tim. iv. Rev. xiii. xvii—xix. It is of a power rising up within the christian church, and arrogating the name to itself: fostering ignorance, superstition, idolatry, and will-worship: displaying craft, pride, ambition, and luxury: and exercising tyranny, cruelty, and intolerance. Have the goodness to read the passages with care, and duly weigh them. Is this the church of Christ? Is this his religion? How astonishing the change! In-

stead of the simple doctrine of the gospel, a huge mass of uncouth and scholastic dogmas ! Instead of its unadorned worship, all the pomp and pageantry which the spirit of the world could display. Instead of its humble ministers, men adorned with gorgeous robes of fantastic forms, and decked with gold, and silver, and precious stones. Instead of instruction by truth, the mind is famished ; but the eye and the ear, the senses and the imagination are feasted with bows and genuflections, with the melody of sounds, and pleasing spectacles, and long processions, and fragrant incense. A complete worldly system is framed ; and *a man* dwelling in the city built on seven hills, becomes the head, and holds all the reins of dominion in his hand : tight and firm he does hold them ; and all move obedient to his will. Instead of honouring the apostles whose names are ever in his mouth, he assumes an equality or even a superiority : he calls himself **INFALLIBLE**. Those of his kingdom who blush to assign him that dignity, gravely assert that two or three hundred bishops, all fallible, when met in what is called a general council, become infallible in all their decisions on the doctrines and duties of christianity. Mark reader ! Each of these men is fallible as an individual : but when two or three hundred of them are assembled in all the weaknesses and passions of fallible men, they become thereby infallible ; and

their decision in every matter is the decision of Jesus Christ himself. Nay more, the bishops who have derived their authority from this wondrous man, the head of the anti-christian kingdom, by laying their hands on any person whom they approve, and uttering a certain form of words, convey to him a new and indelible character. In consequence of the authority thus received, he has power to forgive sins; and by pronouncing four words, he can change the substance of bread and wine into the substance of flesh and blood.

Far from listening to the voice of Christ, when he said, "Who made me a judge and divider among you?"—"my kingdom is not of this world;" the man in the city upon the seven hills, who calls himself his vicar, claimed the kingdoms of the earth as his own; and disposed of all the countries which should be discovered to the west, to one nation, and all that should be discovered to the east, to another; asserted the territories of Europe to be at his disposal; loosed subjects from their allegiance, and kings from their oaths; laid the fairest kingdoms in christendom under an interdict; deposed monarchs from their thrones, and gave them to others by his word; and demanded an honorary revenue from all. Not only did he assert his superiority to all the sons of men on earth, he laid heaven itself under contribution: and *claiming* the good works of the saints above:

as a fund of merit at his disposal, sold them to the highest bidder; and affixed a stipulated price for the pardon of the most odious crime, which the blackest heart had planned, or the most guilty hand had perpetrated; and for indulgence with impunity for the time to come, in any sin which human cupidity could crave.

While, aided by his numerous hosts who fattened on the spoils of his conquests, he was ever watchfully attending to his own interests, and eagerly improving every circumstance which occurred to advance them, and extend his influence, he with eagle's eyes pierced into every obscure recess, where men called heretics were supposed to dwell; and the softest whispers of the discontented entered into his ears. To question his authority, to suggest a doubt whether Christ sanctioned his claims, and to dare to deny their validity, was certain death. Unarmed himself, he commanded the rulers of the nations to execute his decrees: and whether the unhappy persons were many or few, of high or low degree, submission or death was the only alternative. The single heretic met his fate by the magistrates fire or sword; the heretical tribe or province, by the sanguinary hands of the crusading host, breathing out blood and slaughter. Nor did he cease to have recourse to such inhuman measures, till the light of knowledge produced a refusal of his bloody mandates.

Have I been feigning an imaginary, or have I been delineating a real character? To the history of Europe I appeal for the truth of what I assert. For nearly the whole of what I have said, I appeal, O men of France, to you whose country has been stained with the blood of hundreds of thousands, merely “because they would not worship the beast and his image; nor receive his mark on their foreheads, and on their hands.” Peruse the annals of your nation, and you will find that the picture I have attempted to draw, is not an overcharged caricature, but a faint outline.—Was it possible to conceive, that from the bosom of the christian church, such an odious monster would arise: and could human foresight have possibly conjectured that after a lapse of centuries, as it grew to maturity, all the features would gradually acquire the perfect likeness of the hideous original which prophecy had described. How improbable was it at the time of the writing of the New Testament, when a pagan emperor swayed the sceptre, that in a course of years there should succeed a strange kind of government, whose head would be a man calling himself a christian priest, and the vicegerent of Christ on earth. This, God alone could foresee; and God alone could enable the apostles to predict. It is minutely predicted: and the rise, the vast dominion, the decline, and the utter destruction, are all delineated. The two first, history

records; the third, we have partly heard of, and partly seen: may the fourth and last speedily arrive! You have thought the hideous reign of antichrist, and his craft and cruelty a sufficient reason for renouncing christianity: but you mistake. They furnish a just cause for rejecting so absurd a system as you formerly professed: but they present you with a striking evidence of the truth and divinity of the New Testament, in which these abuses were all described; and they should influence you to receive the gospel in its purity. Thus will the dreadful abuse of christianity, which has been adduced as an objection to its truth, be found to furnish an unanswerable argument in its favour.

SECTION VIII.

The Existence and State of the Jews as a separate People.

WHEN I look around me in the world, I observe a people different from all others in looks, in manners, and in religion. I enquire into their origin; and I find they have been a separate people near four thousand years. During almost half that time, they lived in a country by themselves. But for above seventeen hun-

dred years, they have been scattered abroad over the face of the earth, and sojourned as strangers under the dominion of others.—Kind treatment, and a high national character, may influence men to distinguish themselves from the rest of the world. But the Jews, on the contrary, have been every where a hissing and a reproach: their very name has carried with it contempt and ignominy. They have been treated worse than dogs, because they were Jews: and their religion has exposed them to the most sanguinary cruelties. The brutal, nay diabolical behaviour of their enemies has not been the ebullition of the moment: it has continued through many revolving ages. It has not been confined to one place: it has extended to almost every country. They have been hissed at and insulted: this was their every day's usage. They have been robbed, and plundered, and banished, and killed all the day long. In what country of Europe have not these scenes been acted? Had they concealed their origin, had they changed their religion, had they intermarried with the natives of the land where they lived, they would have escaped these evils; and their posterity would have been entirely exempted from reproach. This they well knew: but they still held fast the name, the manners, the religion of Jews; and they intermarried only among themselves. Is there any other instance of this in the world? Where

shall it be found? There is none upon the face of the earth. Take the matter in all its circumstances; and it is *unique* in the government of God, and in the history of man.

While I am meditating on the wonderful phenomenon, I recollect it was foretold by Jesus Christ, Luke xxi. 24; by his apostle Paul, Rom. xi. 25; and still more particularly by Moses, a servant of God, who lived near fifteen hundred years before the coming of the Messiah, Lev. xxvi. Deut. xxviii. Not only the mere event, but the particular circumstances, their captivity, their dispersion, the contempt and hatred of the world, the miseries accompanying their very name, and the cause of these, *their rejection of the Messiah by unbelief*, all were foretold. Predictions how unlikely! Observation and experience gave no countenance to such things. Who can distinguish the Britons, the Romans, the Saxons, or the Normans in England? or the Gauls, the Romans, and the Franks in France? Time and intermarriages have formed of them one people. Much more might it have been expected, that the sufferings of the Jews, like fire, would have melted them down into the common mass of human nature, with the different nations among which they dwelt. But the prediction, unlikely as it was, has come to pass in all its parts: and whoever sees the face of a *Jew*, sees a living argument for the truth and divine au-

thority of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.—It is likewise worthy of remark, that in their dispersion, they carry with them the books of Moses and the prophets, which, while they testify of Christ as the Messiah, contain predictions of their afflicted state, as a separate people, for rejecting him. His most inveterate enemies become the heralds of his glory.

The plans of God, when seen only in part, frequently appear unsightly and uncouth: when complete, they are covered with beauty. It is so here. What we see, is like the limbs severed from the human body: and how mutilated and uninviting is the sight!—But the wretched state of the Jews will have an end. It is predicted, that they shall be converted to the christian faith; and afterwards live in great honour and felicity: “For shame,” as one of their own prophets expresses it, “they shall have double; and for confusion they shall rejoice in their portion: in their land they shall possess double: everlasting joy shall be upon them.” Isa. lxi. 7. How strong a presumptive proof does their separate state furnish of their promised restoration! When they are converted, the argument in favour of the gospel, designed for the benefit and conviction of the whole world, will be seen in all its evidence, and felt in all its force: and its influence on those who till then continue in unbelief, will

be unspeakably great. The evidence in its present state merits the deepest attention of every one who rejects the christian religion.

Read and meditate deeply on the subject. Consider maturely its general nature and design, and these particular predictions. I can confidently appeal to sound judgment and reason; and say, "Is prophecy a just theme of ridicule? Does it consist of some uncertain conjectures, which may be interpreted in any way?" It must be allowed by the candid and impartial to have considerable weight. It is one of those arguments which resemble a river: it acquires greater body and force in proportion to the length of its course: and if we consider the scope of many predictions, and the actual state of a considerable portion of mankind, and the tendency of things in the moral world, do they not afford very weighty evidence of the inspiration of the prophets, and of the truth of the gospel?

CHAPTER VII.

OF THE EVIDENCE FOR THE DIVINE AUTHORITY OF THE
NEW TESTAMENT, ARISING FROM THE SUCCESS OF
THE GOSPEL.

THAT the christian religion had great and extensive success in the world, will be denied by none. But some may reply, "So had the old pagan systems; so had the Koran." The remark is so far just, that mere success abstracted from circumstances, means, and causes, is no proof either of truth or error. There is scarcely a more dangerous principle, than that which leads a person to conclude, that because a plan succeeds, therefore it is right; because the object which he had in view is attained, therefore it is good; and because he has been able to gratify his wishes to the full, therefore it is an evidence of the divine approbation and favour. However common this manner of reasoning has been, and is at the present time, it is utterly destitute of foundation. But though the general maxim be false, it by no means follows but that in some cases, success may be considered as a proof of truth and goodness; and an eminent display of the divine interposition in its favour. It will appear, it is hoped, to be so here. Let the subject be weighed with

impartiality ; and it will be seen that while success pleads nothing in favour of either Paganism or Mahometanism, it is a strong presumptive evidence that Christianity is of God. Consider the following things.

SECTION I.

The Nature of the Christian Religion as contained in the New Testament.

YOU will recollect what has been already written on this subject. Christianity is at war with every evil passion in the human heart : it condemns pride, ambition, and all those dispositions and pursuits which exalt men in their own esteem, and in the esteem of the world. It plainly tells religionists, that all their costly services, their multiplied acts of worship, and their rigorous austerities, will not purchase the pardon of their sins, nor the favour of God, nor a title to eternal felicity : and it calls upon them as guilty, condemned, depraved, and miserable creatures to look for salvation from one who suffered on the cross ; to place all their dependence on him alone, “ for wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption ;” 1 Cor. i. 30, and to live devoted to him. It enjoins a temper and conduct diametrically op-

posite to the wishes of every depraved heart. It strikes at the root of the prevailing sentiments and dispositions of mankind, by proclaiming aloud, "Selfishness shall not reign: drag down the Jezebel from the throne, and trample her under foot." The welfare of our neighbour, the gospel enjoins us to consider as our own, and to love him as ourselves; and the public and general good to consider as paramount to private and individual benefit. Above all, it teaches us that the authority of God is to rule supreme and without a rival in the soul; and that we are to live in a state of constant and entire subjection to him; or to adopt its language, "to glorify him in our body and in our spirit, which are his." 1 Cor. vi. 20. What is there in this religion either to sooth the lofty ideas of the great ones of the earth, or to gratify the appetites and passions of the multitude?

SECTION II.

The Persons by whom the Christian Religion was propagated.

THE founder of christianity was so poor, that he had not where to lay his head: and those whom he chose for witnesses of his character,

and missionaries to the world, had no external glory to recommend them. None of them were men of literature, in the Greek or Roman sense of the word : and Paul only in the Jewish sense. The rest were plain men. They had no family connections, no estates, no titles, not even that of *Rabbi* among their countrymen. They did not, I conceive, appear in what is called the rank of *gentlemen* ; nor had they acquired the modes of behaviour in polite life. They were plain, honest men, of unfeigned piety, and much unadorned good sense ; who delivered their testimony with great simplicity and zeal, and with an ardent affection to their master, and the souls of men. In appearance, dress, and manners, they were considered as verging towards what is called the lower class of society : and in both their idiom and accent they had among their countrymen at Jerusalem, the *patois* (the brogue) of Galilee, and among the Greeks and Romans, the *patois* of the Jews. “What will this babbler say ?” was the contemptuous sneer of the Athenian philosophers : and Paul’s own declaration, “ though I be rude in speech, yet not in knowledge,” unites to confirm the justness of the remark. By the followers of Christ in succeeding ages, the character of the apostles has been justly held in so high a degree of reverence, that we are ready to attach to them a vènerableness of appearance in the eyes of the world, which com-

manded general esteem. But on due consideration, the account which has just been given will be found to be accurate. Judge then what regard would be paid to such men, when they went from place to place, to propagate a new religion, and to assert that every body was in the wrong except themselves. When they every where proclaimed aloud, that unless *each individual* turned from his sinful thoughts and ways; the pagan from all his idolatry to the gospel; and the Jew from relying on his observances, and quitted Moses for Christ, he could not escape the judgments of God,—you can easily anticipate with what hearts the world would listen to their preaching.

SECTION III.

The Means which were employed for propagating the Gospel.

PAGANISM does not afford an instance of any person before the coming of Christ, employing what may be called a *rational* method for converting the inhabitants of any country, or even of a single city, to the belief of the heathen mythology. The system formed in the infancy of society was received as divine, and those who afterwards entered into the community,

must submit to it as the condition of enjoying the benefit of their protection. Mahomet, a man of note among his countrymen, of a family accounted ancient and honourable, in manners a courtier, and attentive to all the punctilios of polite behaviour, sought earnestly to ingratiate himself with those who could promote his views. But finding softness and persuasion to be tedious ways of gaining converts, he took a shorter and more successful method ; and the *ultima ratio regum*, the sword was allowed, and abundantly employed. The booted Hierophant who comes at the head of an army and commands belief, demonstrates that he confides in something besides arguments for success : and success here is no evidence of truth. When I see his sword reeking with blood warm from the hearts of his opposers, I wonder not that he has many proselytes ; but instead of believing, my soul is filled with disgust and abhorrence.

Turn away from the odious spectacle, and view the disciples of Jesus in their humble garb, addressing the multitude in a synagogue, or a handful in a school, or in a private house ! They have no wealth, and they cannot bribe ; they have no influence, and they can promise neither riches nor honours. They preach Jesus Christ, and him crucified. They narrate the history of his life, and death, and resurrection, and ascension : and they declare that it is he

who is appointed to be the Saviour of the world, and the Judge of the living and the dead. Both the Greeks and the Romans were fond of eloquence. (a very florid and gaudy one was the taste of the age) and of fine speaking, even to the very minutest parts of *action*. But the only one of the apostles who can be supposed capable of attempting such a thing, declares, "I came not with enticing words of men's wisdom." The rest could not, if they would: and that they did not aim at it, their writings plainly shew: for if ever there was a book which gave evidence that the writers did not seek for eloquence of composition, it is the New Testament. We may justly consider it as a specimen of their preaching: and it proves that they did not seek to impose on men in any way. "Our exhortation, say they, was not of deceit, nor of uncleanness, nor of guile." They made use of no *political* craft. They were neither sycophants of the rich and great, nor flatterers of the poor: they neither cringed to rulers, nor courted the people: and they made no shew of learning, to impose on the ignorant and vulgar. They gave no promises of any worldly advantage by the change of religion: on the contrary, they told their hearers, "all who will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution." Such were the means used. Were they calculated to deceive the world, and gain converts to an imposture?

SECTION IV.

The Opposition made to the Gospel.

IF opposition was made to the introduction of a pagan system, the sword decided the dispute. Mahomet pretended a commission to silence opposers in the same way. But how different is the spirit of the gospel! "The weapons of our warfare are not carnal."—"Behold," says Christ to his apostles, "I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves." The artillery of opposition to the gospel was planted in every quarter. There was opposition from the prejudices of the *people* attached to the religion of their fathers; and whose attachment was bigotted and fierce in proportion to their ignorance and blindness. There was opposition from the *philosopher* and the learned: Christianity paid no more respect to the speculations of the literati, than to the superstition of the multitude: no wonder that their pride was wounded, and they were roused to revenge the contempt cast upon them. There was opposition from the *priests*, and all who officiated in the temples, and fattened on the sacrifices. Not only their wealth and influence, but their very existence was at stake. How well they could stir up the people to vengeance against inno-

vators, the experience of every age produces abundant testimony. There was still more formidable opposition from the *rulers* of the world. There was not merely an alliance between church and state under the reign of paganism, but perhaps, to speak more properly, an incorporation of religion into the civil constitution: and in the Roman empire especially, the chief magistrates bore the most distinguished offices of religion. The Emperor had the title of Pontifex Maximus, and those who were next to him in power sustained the sacerdotal offices next in dignity. What an alarm may those men be supposed to feel at the entrance of a system, which if successful would strip them of all their dignity and influence in matters of religion; and which might likewise, in their apprehensions, endanger the public peace, and the stability of their civil authority: and how tenacious of every grain of power rulers have always been, the history of all ages clearly demonstrates. Or if they did not themselves suspect danger, the other classes concealing under the pretext of zeal for the rulers' safety and the country's peace, the fears they felt for the loss of their dignities and emoluments, would not be slow to call for the interference of the arm of authority, and put a stop to the designs of such dangerous men.

Nor was there less opposition from the *Jews*, than from the *Gentiles*. Christianity, by placing

all nations on a level, struck a blow at the root of the pride of every *Jew*. His superior privilege in being one of God's peculiar people was instantly lost. So keen an abhorrence had they of this, that when Paul, in the course of a speech, mentioned that Christ had sent him to preach to the Gentiles, they cried out, "Away with such a fellow from the earth, for it is not fit that he should live." Acts xxii. 22. They had heard him for a considerable time in silence; but when he spoke of the Gentiles being admitted to equal privileges with the Jews, they could bear it no longer; but eagerly sought to imbrue their hands in the blood of the profane blasphemer. Such was the spirit of what would be called the *populace* among the Jews. To a smaller portion of honesty the *pharisees* united equal opposition, and superior hatred. If christianity prevail, they must fall from the pinnacle of veneration to the abyss of contempt. And is there any thing which will oppose with greater violence and fervour, than the pride of superior knowledge, and of the sanctimonious observance of every rite? The *priests* had kindred feelings with those among the heathens; the *magistrates* too were forward of themselves to oppose from the causes already assigned; or they were in a manner forced to it, in order to please the people.

All these kinds of opposition were in addition to that grand radical prejudice which reigns in

every depraved heart; namely, the dislike of a religion which commands to sacrifice pride at the foot of the cross of Jesus; and which enjoins perfect purity in heart and life, and the destruction of every sinful thought, and word, and deed.

That this is not speculative reasoning, the treatment of Christ and his apostles, and of inferior teachers, will clearly prove. Reproach, loss of goods, banishment, imprisonment, and death, were their reward from the Jews. The Gentiles betrayed a similar spirit: and the preachers of christianity were treated by them with equal dislike and equal severity. Success here will be remarkable indeed.

SECTION V.

The Sacrifices which those must make, who embrace the Gospel.

IT is not easy for those who live, where christianity is the prevailing religion of a country, and where the civil institutions are not contrary to its dictates, to form a just idea of what every convert in the age of the apostles was obliged to endure, and of the sacrifices he was obliged to make. Paganism had so blended its religious rites with the business and recreations of life, that a conscientious christian was reduced to very considerable difficulties, as well as to very

painful privations. To say nothing of the theatre, the games, the shows, the triumphal processions, in all of which heathen ceremonies were mingled, (and to abstain from these would be reckoned no small sacrifice by multitudes,) idolatrous superstitions insinuated themselves into their family arrangements, and were introduced into their hospitable entertainments, and acts of civility to their friends. This must have been exceedingly painful to the converts to the gospel, and must have almost excluded them from social intercourse, and the enjoyments of relationship and consanguinity.

Besides, they were looked on with aversion by all. Some regarded them as atheists and enemies of their gods: and they were branded as haters, as well as hated, of the human race. Society lost its charms to them: they saw nothing but frowns, or what was more bitter, the smile of ridicule or contempt. They were often cast off by their friends and relations: they were looked upon as the offscouring of all things: they were loaded with the most opprobrious names which hatred could invent: and they had to endure, in silence, the jeers of the rude multitude, as they passed along.

The effects of these sentiments followed christians into the scenes of business, and proved very serious disadvantages in their worldly affairs. Their most bigotted heathen neighbours would have no dealings with those that ab-

horred their gods. Sometimes the furious mob, or a rapacious magistrate, spoiled them of their goods. As if unworthy to enjoy the common blessings of society, sometimes they were cast into prison along with the most abandoned criminals: sometimes they were banished from their country, and all that was dear to them. sometimes the most eminent for piety and zeal, and indeed all who adhered to their profession, were put to death; and in their death, every species of cruelty was employed: and when any public calamity befel the Roman empire, "The christians are the cause," was the pagan cry; and they must expiate the offence by the loss of all things, and by the most excruciating tortures.

Such were the prospects of every man who embraced the gospel, when it was first preached: and every day's experience strongly confirmed the mournful fact. Those who at any time became converts to paganism met with neither injury nor reproach. Mahomet's proselytes were on the road to honour and pleasure, in a present life. The gospel, it is true, had its rewards, but they were such as eye could not see, nor earthly passion feel: they were after death. With such sacrifices in view, who could be expected to embrace the christian faith?

SECTION VI.

The Success of the Gospel and the Number of its Converts.

WHEN I take a close and attentive view of all these things, I do not see, that, according to mere human ideas, christianity could possibly have any success among either Jews or Gentiles. Such a system, introduced by such men, in a way so little alluring, having such formidable opposition to encounter, and demanding such sacrifices from every convert,—what progress can it be supposed to make? A stranger to the records of the christian church would say, *none*. But what was its fate? Three thousand men joined the society of believers, on the very day that the banners of the cross were first raised. Every succeeding one added new subjects to Christ's spiritual kingdom. Myriads in Jerusalem bowed the knee of adoration to the crucified Jesus. Multitudes believed in Samaria, at Lydda, at Joppa, at Cesarea.—From Judea the apostles travel to the Gentiles. There are societies of christians formed at Antioch, at Ephesus, at Corinth, at Athens, and at Rome. Every year produces considerable accessions to the number of believers. The victorious march of the gospel is not stopped by the death of the

apostles: it spreads wider and wider amidst the fiercest opposition. Under persecutions at which human nature shudders, it maintains its ground: and it grows after them with increasing vigour and strength. At last, after near three centuries of contest, its enemies are overcome; it is invited to sit down on the *throne of the Cæsars*; and its glorious energies without help from man, are apparent to all.

What shall we say to these things? That the testimony of the apostles must have been convincing, and accompanied with miraculous powers, as well as with the inward energy of the Holy Ghost? He who denies this, and yet grants (for deny he cannot) the success of the gospel, the success of a religion which was in direct opposition to the sentiments, dispositions, and conduct of all the world, a success rapid, continuing, and increasing, believes the most astonishing miracle that was ever performed. But the sober and patient enquirer, who candidly weighs every part, must acknowledge that this book has claims to veracity and divinity, which are not easily overthrown; and that the success of the gospel, all things considered, is one of the most remarkable events which the moral world has ever presented to view.

Can comparison explain the phenomenon, and remove our astonishment? Comparison still heightens our wonder, and gives additional

force to the argument. I will not compare Mahomet, and the caliphs his successors, with the apostles preaching the gospel; for it would be to compare the effects of brute force, with the pure operations of judgment and reason*.

The philosophers of Greece and Rome were placed in situations nearest to those of the apostles. Arguments were their weapons: they employed no force; but their circumstances were more advantageous. They were admired, and venerated, and regarded as the first of

* The beginning of Mahomet's career bore some resemblance to the manner of the apostles of Christ. He sought to make converts by *persuasion only*. But had he always adhered to this mode, it is more than probable that his religion would have never been heard of beyond the limits of his native city. During the first three years of his mission, he attached but fourteen proselytes to his cause. Seven years' labours scarcely united to him more than a hundred followers. For the space of ten years, his progress was slow and silent within the walls of Mecca. Such was Mahomet's success in circumstances the most favourable to his efforts: for he was of a noble family; he was protected and patronized by some of the first men of the city, who were also related to him by blood; he possessed the most insinuating address; and conducted his measures with consummate skill. There was likewise no established religion supporting a corporation of men, whose interest it was to oppose his progress.—When he found that persuasion would not accomplish his purpose, in the thirteenth year of his mission, he professed to have received divine authority for employing the sword as an instrument of conversion: and from that time the number of his converts increased in proportion to his valour and his success.

mankind. They were numerous; and they had all the countenance of authority, and all the influence of public opinion in their favour that their hearts could wish. Their system was more palatable than the pure unbending maxims of christianity. But what was their success in propagating their tenets, and reforming the world? Who were ever more eloquent than these men? Have greater energies ever been displayed by the human mind, than in the ingenuity of their speculations, in the charms of their composition, and the beauty of their style?—They had the western world for many ages to themselves. One generation of philosophers had an opportunity of improving on another, and of extending widely the united influence of *speaking* and *writing* to accomplish their purpose. But when the apostles appeared, what fruit of their labour was to be found? Where, O Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, shall we see the reformation which your philosophy has produced? We have read of a change in the life of Polemo, and a few individuals besides; but we look for greater things. Paul did more than this by the very first sermon he preached at Athens, while your brethren mocked and ridiculed the preacher. Tell us what nation we shall find imbued with philosophic morality?—Why are you silent? Tell us then, what city? Alas! we cannot find one single society of men, who say, “The philosophers

taught us to reject the idolatry of our country, and to adore the one true God." I am ready to think, I must be wrong. I search again: but my search is fruitless. I can hardly believe that the gardens of Academus, the Stoa, and the Peripatetic walks bring forth so little fruit:—but I am compelled.

From viewing the toilsome but barren labours of the philosophers, I turn to the men of Galilee, and see societies formed in every place; and multitudes casting away their idols with contempt; and renouncing every idolatrous and immoral practice, and every impure disposition; and prostrating themselves with humble adoration before Jehovah. My astonishment increases; and I cannot refrain from crying out, "Here is the finger of God!" Come hither, ye votaries of Socrates and his fellows, and survey the different effects of the sentiments of your sages, and of the preaching of Christ crucified by his chosen witnesses. Account for it if you can.

SECTION VII.

Christianity could have had no Success, if it had not been true.

LET us suppose this to be the year 1780; and that twelve men of untainted morals and apparent piety were to appear at Paris, and declare

publicly in a solemn manner: “ A remarkable person has been for upwards of three years preaching through the whole of France, and very frequently in this capital: he healed the sick, and raised the dead to life, he fed thousands with a few loaves and fishes, and he commanded all men to listen to him as sent of God to be the Saviour of the world. About two months ago, the rulers in church and state, with the concurrence and approbation of the body of the people, conspired against him and put him to death. Hearing he would rise again on the third day, they appointed a guard to the sepulchre; but he rose according to the prediction, as the guards can testify. We saw him many times after his resurrection, and were present when he ascended to heaven. He has commissioned us to testify these things to the world; and as a proof of this has enabled us to speak languages which we never learned, and to work miracles like his own.”—Were they further to tell the people, “ Your rulers have committed a most heinous crime in putting him to death: the former religion of the country is now to cease, and with it the influence and authority of the priesthood: and all are bound to receive our testimony on pain of the divine displeasure.” What effect would such declaration have?

As all are accused, all will be desirous to vindicate themselves from the charge. The most effectual way will be to demonstrate the

falsehood of the testimony. In addition to the common motive, the civil rulers will justly consider that the accusation has a tendency to bring their government into reproach; and besides, that it will weaken their authority among such as embrace the new system; for they will be considered as the murderers of a prophet, nay, of one who called himself the Son of God. The ecclesiastical dignitaries have additional reason for exerting themselves, for their very existence depends on the falsehood of the testimony. Their authority, their rank in society, their wealth, all is gone, if what these men say be true. In such circumstances, will not every possible means be used to detect the falsehood? Will not the matter be searched to the bottom; and every scheme adopted which human ingenuity, quickened by having all at stake, can employ, in order to find out the truth? Is it possible that in such circumstances, imposture can escape detection? They have all the power of the country in their hands: and will they not employ it to discover the cheat? and discovered it must and easily can be, as reference has been made to so many persons, places, times, and occasions. The twelve men have nothing to oppose to all this, but the truth of their testimony; for they are without connections, without influence, and without authority. Who can suppose it possible for an imposture in such circumstances to succeed?

Such was precisely the situation of the Jews, when the apostles of Christ began to preach the gospel at Jerusalem. Would they not, think you, use all possible means to discredit the testimony? They would: they must: they did: for men understood, and were alive to their own interest *then*, as much as they are *now*. But what discoveries did they make? The success of the gospel, and their silence with respect to a detection of the imposture, prove that they made none. Antiquity speaks of none. The writings of the enemies of christianity, both among Jews and pagans, contain none. Had they made any discovery, it is impossible but that it must have come down to us, in various forms. The answers of the christians to the pagans who attacked christianity, as of Origen to Celsus, would have made mention of them, and would have contained at least an attempt at confutation.—Will it be said: “when christianity became the ruling system, every thing written against it was destroyed.” This is impossible. Though the christian religion was established in the Roman empire, several eastern countries did not receive it as the national system: there its enemies would have found an asylum. Besides, the Jews, the most inveterate foes of the gospel, still remained: and many of them were without its bounds. They had their books and records which could not be destroyed: nor does it appear to have

been attempted. The *talmuds* which were composed at a time when christianity was the dominant religion of the empire, have come down to us. But there is no rational and consistent account of any discovery having been made by the Jewish rulers, of the falsehood of the apostles' testimony for Christ.

Indeed the success of the gospel is unaccountable, if their testimony was discovered to be false. Remember, the dispute was not about matters of opinion, to which men might have been wedded through prejudice: it was a question of facts: not only reason, but the senses were to judge; and every man was fully competent to decide. To suppose that after the falsehood of the testimony was established by unquestionable proof, thousands of men who had joined in crucifying Christ, would believe in him; especially when their faith would expose them to reproach, to exclusion from the synagogue and its privileges, to the hatred of their friends and countrymen, to loss of goods, to imprisonment and death, is contrary to the moral order of the universe; and contrary to all those principles by which men, whether they be good men, or bad men, are influenced in their conduct. Ought we to have recourse to this, if any other motive can be adduced? There is an easy one; namely, that the testimony of the apostles was true.

CHAPTER VIII.

OBJECTIONS AGAINST THE DIVINE AUTHORITY OF
THE NEW TESTAMENT CONSIDERED.

WHEN a religion professes itself to be necessary to eternal happiness, and demands our consideration, the serious enquirer will desire to have a view of the evidence by which it is supported. If the arguments be satisfactory, he will regard it as entitled to his reception. But this is not the mode usually adopted by those who reject the gospel. They in general begin by raising difficulties, and starting objections: and *because* these can not be easily solved, they think themselves justified in rejecting the whole.

But this will not, on mature deliberation, be found so rational a conduct as they imagine. Even though it were impossible to answer objections which may be brought forward, the subject may nevertheless have such a weight of evidence in its support, as to ensure a general reception, and a firm belief of its truth. A dangerous mistake has found an entrance into the minds of many: they lay it down as an axiom, that if objections which its advocates

cannot solve, can be urged against a doctrine, they are warranted to brand the whole system with falsehood. The establishment of such a rule of judging would destroy the credibility of almost every science. In direct opposition to its authority, they will find that a system or a doctrine may have such force of argument in its favour, that no man of discernment and candour can withhold his assent; when at the same time objections may be urged, which it is not in the power of any one fully to solve. Whoever takes pains to survey the circle of the sciences, will perceive that there is not one to which difficulties are not attached, and against which objections may not be raised. With regard to the New Testament, this may be expected to be the case, in a still greater degree. The subjects on which it treats are of the most exalted kind; and they are connected with things above our comprehension, or revealed but in part, or entirely veiled. From these and other sources which might be mentioned, how many objections may be raised. But those who profess the principles of natural religion, are involved in similar difficulties; and must throw *it* away as well as the gospel, if a full and satisfactory answer to every objection be essential to their belief: so that the deist is in this respect more nearly on a level with the christian, than he was aware.

These remarks are not designed to serve as an

apology for declining to answer the objections of deists to the christian religion, but to impress their minds with this important truth, that for a system to be *false*, and for a system to have *difficulties* in some of its parts which we cannot resolve, are two different things. So fully are men convinced of this, that there are doctrines which, if a person did not believe, he would be accounted mad, while there are difficulties respecting them, which the wisest of the human race cannot resolve. Under the influence of this sentiment let the evidences of christianity be weighed: then let the objections be brought forth in order; and it will be seen, that they are not so formidable as to shake the foundations of the religion of Jesus. Some of them evidently spring from mistake and error; some from the form of the book which was composed by men of other times, and manners, and customs; and some from the nature of the subject. Were it impossible to answer them, there still remains sufficient evidence for the truth of christianity: but it is hoped, that such things may be suggested to abate their force, as will lead impartial men to conclude, that if the gospel have sufficient evidence to confirm it, the objections have not such a degree of weight as should influence any to reject its divine authority.

SECTION I.

OBJECTION. *If we must examine ONE religion in order to discover its divine origin, it is reasonable that we should examine ALL, and weigh their evidence: and this is so tedious as well as arduous a task, that our lives will be at an end, before it can be accomplished.*

THIS is not so difficult a work as may be at first imagined. The thing wanted is an universal religion, given and designed for the benefit of all mankind. *Paganism* never, in any one form, laid claim to be the universal religion. The *Jewish* dispensation was designed peculiarly for one nation, and only for a season, till the Messiah should appear. *Mahometanism* alone remains in competition with the gospel. Compare the two, and examine their respective evidences. As for external proofs, the religion of Mahomet has none. No predictions announced his coming: nor did he work one miracle to prove that he was a teacher sent from God. So far was he from being able to foretel future events, that in hundreds of instances he shews himself ignorant of the past.— Instead of imitating Jesus, who gave his own life for the sheep, he sheds the blood of others in abundance, for the establishment of his own

dominion. The Jewish religion contained many discoveries concerning God; the christian religion still more, and made ample additions to the list. Mahomet, while he acknowledges both to be from heaven, professes to bring us a new revelation; but it has nothing in it that is *new*: it contains not one valuable truth concerning the divine government, or in short on any religious subject, which was not known before. Will such a system stand the test? What is its use? Let it be placed by the side of the gospel; and let reason judge. The comparison has been drawn by a masterly hand: what the result is, observe and decide. It runs thus:

“ With respect to this instance I persuade myself it can be no very distracting study to find reasons to determine our choice. Go to your natural religion: lay before her Mahomet and his disciples arrayed in armour and in blood, riding in triumph over the spoils of thousands and tens of thousands who fell by his victorious sword: shew her the cities which he set in flames, the countries which he ravaged and destroyed, and the miserable distress of all the inhabitants of the earth. When she has viewed him in this scene, carry her into his retirements; shew her the prophet’s chamber, his concubines and wives; let her see his adultery, and hear him alledge revelation and his divine commission to justify his lust and his oppression. When she is tired with this prospect,

then shew her the blessed Jesus, humble and meek, doing good to all the sons of men, patiently instructing both the ignorant and the perverse. Let her see him in his most retired privacies: let her follow him to the mount, and hear his devotions and supplications to God. Carry her to his table to view his poor fare, and hear his heavenly discourse. Let her see him injured, but not provoked: let her attend him to the tribunal, and consider the patience with which he endured the scoffs and reproaches of his enemies. Lead her to his cross; and let her view him in the agony of death, and hear his last prayer for his persecutors: ‘Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.’

“When natural religion has viewed both, ask which is the prophet of God? But her answer we have already heard; when she saw part of this scene through the eyes of the Centurion who attended at the cross; by him she spake and said, ‘Truly this man was the Son of God’.” *Sherlock’s Disc.* Vol. i. Sermon 9.

SECTION II.

OBJ. *Christianity generates a timid passive spirit, and is not calculated for forming great characters, or producing men who will prove extensive benefactors to mankind.*

FORCE is none of the engines of the gospel: and to bring about a measure however commendable, by doing injury to others, it expressly forbids. But while it discourages and condemns all kinds of violence in the disciples of Jesus, it inculcates and actually produces the most energetic dispositions and conduct. Active benevolence, springing from love to God and man, is the very spirit of the gospel. To promote men's present, and especially their eternal happiness, is one of the christian's great employments; and he is to spare neither labour nor suffering in order to accomplish his end. Christ and his apostles understood the maxims of the gospel, and they acted upon them: they laboured, and they travelled, they were hungry and thirsty, and they suffered the greatest evils in order to do men good. With how bad a grace then is the objection of a passive spirit adduced?

The accusation of *timidity* is equally groundless. Christianity forms men of a singular cast, some would say of singular courage. It teaches

them to be afraid of offending God and doing injury to man; but it labours to render them superior to every other fear. They must carry on a constant war against evil: but “the weapons of their warfare are not carnal.” Was it a timid character which Christ designed to form, when he sent his disciples through all the world to propagate his religion? They were to penetrate into every country: they were to address men of every nation, and tongue, and language: they were to expose themselves to hunger and nakedness, to ridicule and insult, to persecution and death. None of these things must deter them: they must ever be speaking the word of life, however it may be received, and to whatever dangers it may expose them. They must hazard all for the propagation of truth and righteousness in the world.

The lives of christians have, in numberless instances, displayed the efficacy of these divine principles. Can such instances of active exertion, of persevering labour, of patient suffering, be adduced, as those which have been displayed by the true disciples of Jesus Christ? That they make not the noise of those who sack cities, and desolate countries, and spread far and wide the work of destruction, is certainly not to their dispraise. Their method of reforming the world and meliorating the condition of man is not by *brute force*, but by implanting in the heart the sentiments of know-

ledge and of goodness: the fruit will be certain felicity. Christianity does all her work, and effects all her purposes, by means of *principles*: she employs, and she permits no other way beside.

Candid objector, do you not retract your accusation: and say, “ I was mistaken?”

SECTION III.

OBJ. *Christianity is the Friend of Despotism, and the Enemy of Liberty.*

THE grand design of the New Testament is to teach religion. What relates to civil institutions it notices only so far as moral obligation is concerned. *Forms* of government it leaves to the wisdom of men to regulate, and to nations to frame. But what the *spirit* of governments should be, it plainly dictates: and it authoritatively lays down the principles by which both governors and governed should regulate their conduct*.

* There are two questions respecting civil government, which though perfectly distinct, are frequently confounded. The one is, “ What does the New Testament say, should be the character and conduct of rulers and subjects?” or in other words, “ What duties do rulers owe

The foundation of civil government, the religion of Jesus, lays in JUSTICE. It represents the human race as one great family, and all men as brethren. Suppose ten millions of these men, members of one community, and subjects of one government: they have all and each an equal right to justice; and this right cannot be taken away, so long as God their common Father reigns in heaven, and so long as all men are brethren. The New Testament gives all a right, that the institutions of society should be equitable; and that no one should suffer a grain of oppression, in order to confer advantages on another beyond his due. Should maxims of injustice have been acted on for a thousand years, christianity commands the government to abandon them, and justice to resume her

to subjects, and subjects to rulers?" The other question is, "How far, according to the New Testament, and how long, subjects are bound to obedience, supposing the rulers do not perform their duty, but act in direct opposition to it?"—The first question *only* is here considered, and is all that was necessary to remove the objection. The second lies entirely without the range of this essay, and it never entered the author's thoughts to discuss it. It involves a piece of casuistry of difficult discussion, according to the common sentiments of men, but not on the system of the author, who thinks that Christ taught his disciples not to reform their country by violence and force, not to break the peace of society, and to make use of no other weapons than *truth and love*.

seat, and to execute righteous judgment without delay.

But let us hear the New Testament speak for itself; and it speaks with plainness and fidelity, and yet with a delicacy suited to the age in which it was written, and to the jealousy of the governments which then existed. See Romans xiii. 1. Civil government, it says, is an ordinance of divine institution: this means, it is the will of God that men should not live as the beasts of the field without controul; but that they should be formed into societies regulated by laws; and that these laws should be executed by magistrates appointed for the purpose. What kind of government, and what kind of rules are designed, the writer particularly specifies: "They are not a terror to good works but to evil. Do that which is good, and thou shalt have praise of the same: for he is the minister of God to thee for good. But if thou do that which is evil, be afraid; for he beareth not the sword in vain: for he is the minister of God, an avenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil."—"They are God's ministers attending continually to this very thing;" i. e. their talents and their time are all employed in this great and good work. These are the principles of government which the New Testament lays down, and these the duties which it prescribes to the rulers of the nations.

But christianity does not confine its injunctions to one part of the community, and leave the rest to act as they please. By no means. It addresses itself likewise with equal energy to the people, and it binds on their consciences the obligations of subjection and obedience. And is not this too highly reasonable, and exactly corresponding with the nature and state of things? If the members of a community refuse to honour and obey the divine ordinance, and to be subject to government, and to give high respect to rulers, and to pay them tribute; and all this not from fear of punishment, but for conscience sake; it will be allowed by every rational man, that they resist an ordinance of God, an ordinance which is both reasonable and beneficial, and deservedly receive to themselves condemnation. Read likewise 1 Peter ii.

Such is the doctrine of the New Testament respecting civil government; such are its grand moral principles, and such its specific declarations on the subject. In every domestic relation, it lays down fairly and equitably the duties on both sides; namely of husbands and wives, of parents and children, of masters and servants; and presses on all their obligations with equal force. Did it tell one party, "You may neglect your duty to the other, but claim what is due from them to you;" objectors would have had

too much reason to say, "This book cannot come from God." But it leaves no room for such a charge; for both on superiors and inferiors it enforces without partiality, the mutual obligations of duty. The same method is observed here. Religion walks without fear into the palace of the king; she approaches him with dignity as he sits upon his throne; and she proclaims with the tone of authority, "He that ruleth over man must be just, ruling in the fear of God!" 2 Sam. xxiii. 3. She goes from thence into the hall of Judgment, and with the mien of a superior, addresses herself to the judges as they sit on the tribunal: "Ye shall not respect persons in judgment." Deut. i. 17. "Defend the poor and fatherless: do justice to the afflicted and needy: deliver the poor and needy: rid them out of the hand of the wicked." Psalm lxxxii. 3, 4. From the courts of justice she goes out to the multitude of the people, and she proclaims through the streets of the city: "Let every soul be subject to the higher powers." Rom. xiii. 1. "Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake: whether it be to the king as supreme, or unto governors, as unto them that are sent by him for the punishment of evil doers, and the praise of them that do well. For so is the will of God, that with well-doing you may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men." 1 Pet. ii. 13, 14, 15.

When you have accompanied her in her progress, and heard her address to every class of men ; instead of finding a just cause of objection, is there not rather reason from the impartiality and rectitude of the principles displayed, to conclude that here is an additional argument to prove the christian religion to be from God.

SECTION IV.

OBJ. *Christianity establishes a System of Priestcraft, and exalts the Clergy to exorbitant Wealth, and a spiritual Despotism over the Consciences of Men.*

THE mass of mankind is busily engaged in worldly pursuits, and has but little leisure for mental improvement. That there should be teachers of religion to instruct them in its principles, to inforce its numerous precepts, and to administer its consolations, has nothing in it contrary to fitness and the public good. If the knowledge of arts and sciences be beneficial to a country, and the teachers of them be regarded as in the number of the most useful members of the community, those whose office and employment it is, to instil into the minds of the people the principles of pure religion and morality, (principles which are the best cement

of civil society,) certainly stand on equal or superior ground in respect to general utility. When it is further considered, what are the qualifications which the New Testament requires its teachers to possess, the argument will acquire additional weight. "A bishop, i. e. the teacher of religion in a society of christians, must be blameless, sober, of good behaviour, not self-willed, not soon angry, not given to wine, not given to filthy lucre; but a lover of hospitality, a lover of good men, just, holy, temperate; he must not strive but be gentle unto all men; apt to teach, patient in meekness, instructing those that oppose themselves." 1 Tim. iii. Tit. i. 2 Tim. ii. Against this office what can be said with reason?

"But have not the most extravagant claims both to wealth and power been set up by men calling themselves ministers of the gospel of Christ?" I do not deny the fact: but I say, let not christianity bear the blame, because none is due. The question is, on what footing does the New Testament establish the support of the ministers of religion? and it will be found that it establishes it in such a way, as every reasonable man must approve. It is thought equitable that men who apply their younger years to the acquisition of languages and of philosophy, and who spend their days and strength in teaching them to others, should receive from those whom they teach, such a recompense for

their labour as to enable them to support themselves and their families, in a decent and respectable manner. Who will complain of this as improper and unjust?—The gospel sets the maintenance of its ministers on the same footing. “The workman is worthy of his hire. They that serve at the altar should live by the altar. When they dispense to others of their spiritual things, they should in return receive of their worldly things.” This is all that christianity demands; and she is answerable for no other claim. Is it not reasonable that men of talents, education, and benevolence, who devote their lives to the spiritual instruction of their fellow creatures, with a view to make them good and happy both in this life and that which is to come, should receive such a remuneration as to enable them to live, not in affluence and splendour, far less in luxury and extravagance, but in the respectability of a decent competence. The application of the same education and abilities to another employment would have secured wealth. Do they make exorbitant claims, when they ask from those whom they are labouring to instruct, a decent support?

Nor does the New Testament countenance in the ministers of religion a claim of *power*, more than of wealth. Humility is pointed out by Jesus as the road to exaltation: and the way to be the greatest of all, is to be the servant of

all. Arguments, entreaties, prayers, all derived from the scriptures, are the only arms which the New Testament warrants them to use. If the wicked will not turn from the evil of their ways, there remains nothing but to leave them to the judgment of a righteous God. With respect to such as have joined the society of believers, and afterwards conduct themselves amiss, Christ himself prescribes the following mode of proceeding: "If thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone. If he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother: but if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican." Matt. xviii. 15, 16, 17. No civil privilege is taken away, no injury sustained as to worldly affairs: all that Christ enjoins is a separation from the communion of his disciples. In a society of artists or philosophers, if a person will not conform to their rules, they exclude him: and where is the hardship or injustice? for these rules are the bonds of the society. This is all that christianity does: and who will say that it is wrong for a society of pious and moral men, who are united by the principles of piety and morality, to exclude such as are im-

pious and immoral? The wisdom as well as the equity of the gospel in this respect must be justified, not only by its children, but by strangers.

The extravagant claims of some to the power of forgiving sins, and opening to men the gates of heaven, have laid a foundation for the establishment of the worst, because a spiritual, despotism. But christianity is entirely free from the charge. The sacred scripture contains the whole of the christian religion: *that*, and *that alone*, the ministers of the gospel are to teach: and *that*, and *that alone*, the people are to receive. The book is to be in the hands of all, that all may understand it and be wise. Whatever a minister asserts to be a christian doctrine, he is to prove from the New Testament: and his assertion that it is contained there, is not to be received by the people as proof; but they are to examine carefully the writings of the evangelists and apostles for themselves. If it be found in the New Testament they are to receive it, not on the word of the minister, but on the authority of the apostles of Christ: if it be not the doctrine of scripture, they are commanded not to receive it, whoever may enjoin the contrary. The dispensation of the two simple ordinances of Baptism and the Lord's supper has no mystery attached to it. No virtue is derived from the power of the minister: all the benefit arises from the blessing of Christ,

which is not at the disposal of any of his servants.—Where, my friend, is the priestcraft of which you complain? Point it out in any one instance. But you cannot. Let the objection then be erased from your mind, and acknowledge that in this respect the gospel is perfectly reasonable, and infinitely distant from priestly domination and influence.

SECTION V.

OBJ. *The Blood which Christianity has shed, the Massacres which it has planned and executed, and the Miseries which it has brought upon the Earth, must seal its Condemnation.*

THAT men calling themselves christians, have persecuted others with unrelenting cruelty, and have shed rivers of innocent blood, is but too true. Did christianity countenance this conduct, it would merit unqualified reprobation. But far from such a disposition, it forbids all violence and injury to be employed in its defence. Christianity never shed a drop of its enemies' blood, since the day that Christ died on the cross; but it has been lavish of its own. It never forged a chain to bind a heretic or an adversary; nor erected a prison to immure him. Christianity never dipped her pen

in tears or blood, to write a penal law denouncing vengeance on infidels. She never made her bitterest foe heave a groan, from any bodily suffering inflicted by her hands. Her only weapons of offence and defence are truth and prayer. She returns good for evil, and blessing for cursing.

If men wearing the garb of the disciples of Jesus, instigated by pride and the lust of dominion, and a desire to gratify the worst passions of the human heart, injure any of the human race under a pretence of zeal for religion, they act in direct opposition to the gospel; and you cannot condemn them with too much severity. But surely christianity should not be condemned for what it forbids men to perpetrate, under pain of the divine displeasure. Or if such as were truly christians, ever sought to put a stop to infidelity or error, and to propagate the gospel in the world by force, (and it is to be deplored with tears of blood, that such there have unhappily been,) they will receive no more thanks from Christ, than the three disciples when they wished him to bring down fire from heaven to destroy the Samaritans: "Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of: The Son of Man came not to destroy men's lives, but to save them." Nor would he account the words, which he directed to Peter on a different occasion, too severe to be used to them here: "Get thee behind me,

Satan : thou art an offence unto me ; for thou savourest not the things which be of God, but the things which be of man.” Both the principles and precepts of the gospel, and the conduct of Christ and his apostles, are as remote from persecution, as the east is from the west.

SECTION VI.

OBJ. *Christ's Appearance on Earth was distinguished by a Meanmess which seems beneath the Dignity of the Son of God.*

THIS objection arises from a worldly spirit, and from an ignorance of real greatness. Had Christ appeared with the design for which the Jews expected him, and which Mahomet professed to have, the power, dignity, and splendour of an earthly monarch would have been highly suitable: but his intention was of a different kind; and his kingdom was not of this world. He came to bear witness to the truth, to exhibit a pattern of every virtue, and to expiate the sins of men by his own blood: and his external humiliation was well adapted to answer all these purposes. When a teacher addresses us, it is desirable that the hearers be not overawed by external majesty; but that the mind be calm, in order that it may deliberately examine his pretensions, and his doctrine. When

a person is designed for a pattern to mankind, is it not fit that he should appear in a situation, which falls to the lot of the great mass of the children of men? The manner of Christ's appearance accorded also with the nature of his religion. He came to call men away from the love of the world, from ambition, avarice, and sensual pleasure; and to teach them that true greatness consists in goodness, apart from any external grandeur. He came to exhibit, by way of example, the virtues suitable to a present state, especially the most difficult ones, meekness, patience under sufferings, bearing and forgiveness of injuries, and love in return for hatred. He came to testify his father's displeasure against the sins of men, and to suffer for them, "the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God." What station in life, what kind of appearance on earth was most fit for, nay would at all suit these purposes, but a state of external humiliation; or that which the proud world, borrowing its language from its vicious dispositions, calls *meanness*?

Some may say, "I would have him sometimes displaying his dignity and glory." But did not Christ feed many thousands of hungry persons with the small provisions made for his own family? Did he not heal the sick, and give sight to the blind? Did he not raise the dead to life? Was not this glory infinitely superior to what earthly monarchs could ex-

hibit, and of a kind which peculiarly suited the nature, and promoted the purposes of his benevolent mission to the children of men?

SECTION VII.

OBJ. *Christianity is known only to a small Portion of Mankind: if it were from God, would it not be universal in its Extent?*

Do you believe any one religion to be divine? If you do, the objection is answered. The deist cannot urge it with any propriety; for his religion is very far from being universal: we shall find in the world fifty persons professing christianity for one who professes deism. Besides, we clearly see that many benefits which God has bestowed on men, are partial as to the enjoyment. Some are given to particular nations, but denied to the rest of the world: others are possessed by some individuals only, of a favoured nation. A moderate knowledge of history will be sufficient to convince us, that in the moral government of the world, the bounties of providence, as well as mental endowments, and the means of improvement, are distributed with what appears to us an unequal hand. When the objections to this inequality of distribution are considered and refuted, the ob-

jection arising from the partial knowledge of christianity is answered at the same time.

The subject may be viewed in another light. Some blessings flow immediately from God to every person who enjoys them : others are conveyed by the instrumentality of man ; and depend on the philanthropy of man, for their continuance and extension. The last is the case as to the knowledge of christianity. When it was first revealed, it was committed into the hands of the disciples of Jesus ; and its propagation in the world ever since has depended on their exertions in publishing it among the nations. That a melancholy negligence has been too often betrayed, must be acknowledged and deplored. But at the same time it will be found, that in numberless instances the most violent opposition has been made to the zealous endeavours of christians ; and that it is owing to the sanguinary persecutions of the rulers of the world, that the gospel does not now enlighten the whole habitable globe. If a conqueror, followed by his powerful army, desolate a country, and burn the cities and villages, and destroy the cattle and the fields of corn, and the people perish for cold and hunger, is their misery to be ascribed to a lack of goodness in God, or to the superabounding wickedness of man ? The answer will equally apply to the subject before us.

The objection will appear still less cogent, if

it be considered that christianity is not the religion of a day; nor of an age; but a scheme of mercy extending itself through thousands of years, which gradually attains its triumphs, and which, overcoming all opposition, will at last be diffused over the face of the whole earth. The tendency to this must be obvious to every friend of the gospel, who is an attentive observer of the moral state of mankind. When the gospel has produced its full effect, the objection will entirely cease; for according to the language of prophecy, "Men shall be blessed in Jesus; and all nations shall call him blessed." Ps. lxxii.

SECTION VIII.

OBJ. *The Effects produced in the World by the Christian Religion have been few and small, and of little Benefit to the Human Race.*

ALTHOUGH this be often urged with confidence, it is without due consideration; for the effects of the gospel have been numerous, important, and highly beneficial. The grand influence of the gospel is in the hearts of individuals. It formed them anew; it teaches them to serve God and love one another, and it trains them up for a state of eternal felicity. The disposition and character thus changed display

their energy in the bosom of domestic life. The duties of husbands and wives, of parents and children, of masters and servants, are performed in a new manner; and a measure of comfort enjoyed, that was before unknown. Every relative obligation is felt, and suitable returns made. Millions have openly professed this religion at the hazard of their lives. How many more may we suppose there are, who from timidity, the interference of friends, and considerations of a worldly nature, have been afraid to avow their conviction, which however has had a considerable influence on their conduct. These *every-day* effects of the gospel on multitudes among the mass of mankind have been over-looked by the great ones of the earth, and considered as nothing. This is still the case, and many intelligent persons do not reflect that what takes place in families, constitutes by far the largest portion of virtue or vice, of happiness or misery, which a nation, or which the world, feels.

But there are effects of a more conspicuous kind, which must be acknowledged by all. At the coming of Christ, the world was filled with idols. So fondly were men attached to them, that all the philosophers with all their efforts could not banish them from a single village. The Jews succeeded with many individuals among the heathen, but with not one community. The gospel has banished idolatry from

Europe*, and from a considerable part of Africa, and Asià, and America. This has been accomplished by the propagation of its principles; and it has had an extensive additional effect *mediately* by the conquest of the Koran, which derived from the scriptures the doctrine of one true God. How many countries are there in different quarters of the globe, whence heathen idolatry is banished, and God the Creator worshipped! The effect is to be traced to the gospel of Jesus as its cause: that alone has produced the wonderful revolution.

There are other effects of a very important nature introduced by christianity, which are not considered by its opposers, nor traced to their real source. The gospel has made an astonishing change in the state of society; and has introduced a greater measure of goodness and happiness than was ever known before. Many virtues which were formerly considered as *heroic*, are become *common*. It has insinuated a considerable portion of its general principles into the laws of nations, and rendered them more equitable: and it has had an astonishing influence on public opinion, and manners.

* Some persons in France, amidst other fooleries, when they set up a damsel as an emblem of the goddess of reason, had not the face to make a statue to Jupiter or Juno. The light of christianity, which they despised, shone so bright by its general principles on their minds, that however much they might wish it, they durst not erect an altar to a heathen deity.

It has softened the horrors of war ; and rendered the treatment of prisoners more humane. It has pleaded the cause of the indigent, the widow, and the aged ; and it has alleviated the miseries of their lot. Let a comparison be made between the nations of christendom, and the heathen countries both in ancient and modern times, in all these respects ; and the excellency of the gospel will be seen in its important and beneficial effects.

If these things be duly considered, it may be asserted without fear of contradiction, that christianity produced the greatest *revolution* which the world ever saw, or has yet seen ; a revolution of soul. It is a revolution in sentiments, in disposition, in conduct ; and effected by principles pure, powerful, extensive, continuing to this day, and still exerting their influence with unabated energy. And to whom are we indebted for this revolution ? *A poor man* in Judea, without a penny in his purse, without arms, without the concurrence of the learned or the great, and in opposition to power, to wealth, to influence, to force, overthrew the ancient religions, and changed the face of the world !

SECTION IX.

OBJ. *The Attachment of Multitudes to Christianity arises merely from the Prejudices of Education.*

PREJUDICES of every kind are bad; and the gospel forbids them all. Fond propensities without reason, *for* a thing, and violent antipathies *against* it, are equally condemned by its impartial voice. If a person have no other cause for being a Christian but the prejudices of education, that is his own fault, not the gospel's. At the same time, it should be considered that there are prejudices *against* what is learnt in early life, as well as in favour of it. Good principles may be taught us then, as well as bad ones: and good principles received in education may be rejected without examination; as well as bad ones received in education, may without examination be retained. There may be prejudices without enquiry or reason against Christianity, as well as for it: and persons who have had an infidel education, may be prejudiced in favour of infidelity, just as naturally and as readily as those who have had a Christian education, may be in favour of Christianity.

After considering what has been adduced by way of evidence for the truth of the gospel, this objection will have but little weight: and

that little will be taken away when we reflect, that though now the prejudices of education are in favour of Christianity, at first it had the prejudices of education, fashion, influence, public opinion, and every thing to contend against: and it was only by overcoming them that the gospel prevailed in the world.

SECTION X.

OBJ. *Very few of the Great and the Learned embraced the Christian Religion.*

“How hardly shall they that are rich enter into the kingdom of heaven,” was a declaration of the founder of Christianity: and history and observation confirm its truth. It is asserted by some of the first names in literature, that at the time of the planting of the gospel in the world, the superior class in society despised the national religion, and considered it merely as a convenient tool of the state. How unlikely is it, that such persons should pay the smallest attention to what was considered as a *foreign superstition*, introduced by men of inferior stations. Though a few of the great were numbered among the disciples of Christ, can we wonder if nearly the whole of them rejected him, and stedfastly adhered to the old religion as the guardian of their ancient and peculiar privileges?

It has likewise been confidently asserted, that “ Had Christianity been true, the philosophers and learned men would have embraced it with avidity.” Some did embrace the gospel, and wrote treatises in its defence: but the generality of them were among its foes. We shall not wonder at this, when we consider that they were placed in a situation not very dissimilar to the former class, and nourished dispositions equally unfavourable to the gospel. Tacitus and Suetonius briefly mention Christ and his religion. Some of the most eminent literary men of the succeeding age do the same: and Lucian endeavours to hold the Christians up to ridicule. But one thing is evident in all: none of them understood the nature of Christianity: they speak of it like babes. We shall not be surprised at this, when we find a similar ignorance in a more enlightened age. Voltaire in his strictures on Calvinism, in his *Siecle de Louis xiv.* was evidently ignorant of the doctrines and spirit of the sect, which he describes with so much bitterness and contempt. There is an event of the same kind, and still more remarkable, in England. *Methodism* has subsisted there for upwards of half a century. The sect consists of some hundred thousand persons; and they have given the world a full account of their principles. Notice has been taken of them, by some of the first literary characters, in their publications: but we see that they were unac-

quainted with their system, and have grossly misrepresented it. Whether a single exception can be found, may be a doubt: and the ignorance still remains. In all these instances it proceeds from the same cause: they feel a contempt for the new sect as scarcely able to name a man of fashion among its votaries: or if they pay any attention to its tenets, it is with a disposition of mind which regards the system as infinitely contemptible. In such a case they cannot understand it, nor perceive its evidence: the whole is conducted under the influence of prejudice. This will easily and naturally account for the unbelief, both of the great, and of the philosophers and men of letters.

SECTION XI.

OBJ. *There are many Divisions, and great Dissensions among Christians.*

THE truth of the objection is readily admitted, but its force is denied. Consider Christianity as coming from God,—it is pure and unspeakably good: view it as received by men, it will be, as schoolmen say, *secundum modum recipientis*. If the difference of capacity, and the prejudices and passions of mankind be duly weighed, we shall not account it strange, if they do not think alike, nor receive the truth in all its purity.

But this is not peculiar to the Christian religion. There are divisions and dissensions as to religious sentiments among pagan idolaters, among mahometans, and among deists. You cannot deny it. But the deist does not consider this as a reason for rejecting deism. If so, neither is it a reason for rejecting christianity.

More particularly, some men are destitute of every noble principle: they are full of deceit, avarice, pride, and sensuality. We see them abuse the gifts of nature and of providence: is it wonderful then, if they pervert christianity too, and entertain different ideas of many of its doctrines from men of goodness and humility? It is no more an objection against christianity being from God, because such persons err from its purity, than that the gifts of nature and of providence came not from God, because they use them in a different manner from wise and holy men. Weakness of intellect will produce peculiarities of sentiment on every subject, and consequently on religion. The prejudices of education and early habits will generate attachments to certain opinions and rites; hence also differences in religion will arise; but the fault is not in christianity, it is in man. From similar causes, we see a diversity of judgment among the learned respecting sciences of great utility, namely medicine, law, politics, philosophy: but notwithstanding this, all allow them to be highly beneficial to mankind: none deny their

usefulness, although people differ about some particular points. To reject the gospel because bad men pervert it, and weak men deform it, and angry men quarrel about it, and bigotted men look sour on others and curse them because they do not agree in every tittle with themselves, displays the same folly as if a person should cut down a tree bearing abundance of delicious fruit, and furnishing a refreshing shade, because caterpillars disfigured the leaves, and spiders made their webs among the branches.

SECTION XII.

OBJ. *There is much Obscurity in the New Testament, and there are many things mysterious.*

BEFORE complaints of this kind can furnish a solid objection, it is necessary to know what was the design of the writers of the volume. If it was their declared intention to make every thing so clear, that there should be no obscurity, and every thing level to our capacity, so that there should be nothing mysterious, then obscurity and mysteries may be urged as a just ground of complaint. But no such promise is given; and it appears evidently to be the intention of the author, that the book should contain things obscure and mysterious, as well as things plain and clear: yet no just objection

arises hence. The sun is the light, and a sufficient light to the world ; but there are different degrees of clearness : distant bodies are not so distinctly perceived as those which are near : objects do not appear so clear by twilight, as at noon-day ; nor at noon in the shady grove, as in the open field : but still the sun answers all the purposes which God intended. It is so with the New Testament. But to take a more particular view of the subject.

The New Testament is charged with *obscurity*. Many things, it will be allowed by all, are exceedingly plain ; these are the most necessary truths. Some parts are obscure. The obscurity arises from different causes. It is an old book written in the oriental manner : the language, the figures, and the mode of composition, all so different from ours, sometimes create a difficulty. There are references to events and circumstances, with which we are imperfectly, or not at all acquainted. The nature of the subject may be sometimes assigned as a cause : and sometimes the intention of the writer, who did not mean to give us a full view, but a rapid glance. The comprehensive design will account for a part of the obscurity : Some truths were put into the New Testament for the particular benefit of those who were to live at the distance of one or two thousand years ; and in earlier ages were hard to be understood. But of the parts which wear the

veil of obscurity, how many become plain from study and vigorous application of mind. If God give men an understanding, certainly its energies should be employed here: and there is nothing unsuitable to the divine nature, that a revelation should be given, some parts of which require the utmost exertion of intellect in order to perceive the truth. If after all, certain passages remain obscure, the reason has been already assigned; or they may be classed under the following part of the objection.

“ Some things in the New Testament are *mysterious*.” What right has man to require that all should be light, and all level to his comprehension? Are there not mysteries in the works of creation, concerning which the wisest philosopher must confess his ignorance? Is not this the case in natural religion? Who can comprehend God’s necessary existence, a Being without a cause producing it? Why then should it be considered as an objection against the New Testament, that there are some things in it which we cannot fully comprehend? If after we have seen on numberless occasions faith uniting with reason, the writers should on some instances soar above reason, but never stand in opposition to its dictates, what just cause has man to complain?

It merits peculiar notice, and is of great weight on this subject, that God in his moral government has not, in any one instance, acted

as *man* would have done: so different is his reason from man's, and his judgment, as to what is wisest and best. When a person surveys the annals of the nations, what disorder, what wickedness, what confusion, what misery! But let him consider this is the history of what takes place under the moral government of God, whose plans are infinitely wise and righteous and good; and who, while he consults his own honour, is promoting the happiness of those who love him, and in the highest degree. How mysterious does every thing appear! He who believes the perfections and providence of God, must acknowledge the fact; but he is utterly at a loss to explain how it can possibly be. The *thing* itself is certain, but the *manner* is a perfect mystery: the machinery is infinitely too complicated for man to survey and comprehend.

Some Greenland boys, when the missionaries were attempting to teach them the alphabet, disgusted with the task, exclaimed, "Is it not far better to be in a kajak catching seals, as our fathers do, than to be crying A, B, C; or like you, scrawling all day long with a feather?" The good to be derived from education was a mystery. Some of the parts of divine instruction and their connection with the end they are designed to produce, are equally mysterious to us. When we were children, there were things in the conduct of our parents, the reason of

which we could not comprehend. And shall the little child *man* imagine that he can understand every dispensation of the great father of all? We have since seen the wisdom of our parents in that which we condemned; and should not man form the same judgment in respect to the government of God?

If the subject be duly considered, so far from its appearing suspicious that there should be mysteries in the christian religion, it will rather be regarded as a proof of its divine origin. If nothing more was contained in the New Testament, than we knew before; or nothing more than we could easily comprehend, we might justly doubt if it came from God, and whether it was not rather a work of man's device. Were there mysteries in the *duties* of christianity, an objection might justly be raised; but not so with respect to the *doctrines*. That there will be some things respecting the nature and government of God which are not fully revealed; some things which are merely hinted at on account of their connexion with other parts of divine truth; and some things which are just mentioned but not explained, because they exceed the grasp of the human understanding, it is natural for us to expect: and what just ground is there of complaint? In a word, if in the phenomena of nature, and in the moral government of the Deity there are many things confessedly mysterious; is it not more than pro-

bable that this will be the case in a revelation of his will, where the subject is equally vast, and in some respects far more comprehensive? *Without mysteries* the gospel would not be like the works of God.

SECTION XIII.

OBJ. *When we survey the Form and Mode of Composition of the Books of the New Testament, we cannot conceive that they were written by divine Inspiration.*

THE New Testament is undoubtedly a very remarkable book. Men who never studied language or composition, wrote it in a foreign tongue. Illiterate Jews drew it up in Greek, which was the most common medium of intercourse in the civilized world at that time: the idiom of consequence is oriental, the words are from Greece: it may be said that they thought in Hebrew, and wrote in Greek. Its *contents* have been already considered; and the world is challenged to produce a book on subjects equally important, and at the same time so instructive and satisfactory. The *method* is more loose than suits a modern taste; but it is just what we should look for from such men, and in such an age. As to the *style*; it is what it might be expected, that men in their circumstances

and with their views, would employ. Excepting part of the Old Testament, it is the simplest book that ever was written.—None make so ridiculous a figure as illiterate men, when they wish to write fine language. The evangelists and apostles make no such attempt: they are above it: they are never at pains to stop for a word, but take just such as occur: every one must see that they are minding *things* and not *words*. According to the taste of their nation and age, there is a great deal of figurative language, and much allegory, and frequent allusions to the sacred books of the Jews. But notwithstanding these peculiarities, their manner of representation is so luminous, as to be altogether unequalled. In proof of this it is absolutely certain, that a person unaccustomed to mental exertions, whether from his youth, or want of practice, or weakness of capacity, will understand more of the history of the New Testament than of any other book; and have clearer ideas of the facts which are narrated: he will likewise have more distinct conceptions both of its religious principles and moral precepts, than he could derive from the writings of the most celebrated philosophers, were even the same truths contained in them.

It is not difficult to raise objections against the form of the New Testament; and they may at first sight appear plausible: but the more they are considered, the less weight they will

be found to have. There is a great diversity of taste with respect to the composition of a book, between people in the eastern and the western parts of the world: besides this, almost every nation has its distinguishing taste. When God grants a written revelation of his will, it cannot suit even so much as the *national* taste of all the human race. Is it not natural to suppose, that he will leave the men whom he is pleased to employ, to follow the method which was familiar to the age and nation in which they lived? As he selected *Jews* for this purpose, we may expect to find the oriental manner of writing, distinguished by the peculiar taste of the Jewish people. And where is the injustice and unreasonableness of God's requiring men to receive the knowledge of his will in the dress of the land of Canaan? If an eastern prince grant to any European nation, a letter of privileges conveying singular advantages in commerce, who refuses it, and objects that the letter is drawn up in the outlandish phraseology of oriental composition? Display the same candour here; and the objection will no more be heard. Is it wise to say, "I cannot think this book, though full of blessings, is from God; and I will not receive it, because the men who wrote it had long beards, and wore loose garments, and did not appear in a French dress!" As to what respects style, it is beneath the author to be solicitous about ornaments:

God will not address us, as a rhetorician would. The speech of a king is not, or should not be gaudy and laboured: and the laws of nations are not promulgated in flowery language.

SECTION XIV.

OBJ. *How can we be certain that the Books of the New Testament were written by the Apostles of Christ: and if they were, that they have not been interpolated and corrupted since?*

YOU are satisfied that the Iliad was written by Homer, the Eneid by Virgil, the works of Horace by that poet, and the orations of Cicero by the famous Roman orator of that name. If I ask, why do you believe this? The testimony of all antiquity, you say, confirms it. The books of the New Testament have the same authority in their favour. This additional evidence they have, that as their contents are more important, and they professed and were thought by multitudes to contain doctrines essentially necessary to salvation, people were far more interested in knowing that they were written by the apostles of Christ, as they derived all their value thence. What is there in the works of Homer or Virgil which could provoke so strict a scrutiny? Let it be seriously

considered then, that whatever overthrows the New Testament, overthrows all other ancient books, and along with them all the evidence of testimony. Those men of later times who have called in question the authority of the New Testament, are not aware of the absurdity of their conduct. When Hardouin the Jesuit, a very learned man, gravely asserted and maintained that Homer, and Virgil, and Horace, and Cicero, and all the other Greek and Roman classics were written by cloistered monks in the middle ages, there was so deep a sense of the gross absurdity of the thing, that he drew upon himself the universal laugh of the literary world: and that was confutation enough. The same treatment is justly due to those who assert that the New Testament was written by other men than the apostles of Christ: for it is a thousand times easier to forge such writings as those of Homer and Virgil, than the Gospels and Epistles.

That the writings of the New Testament have not been *interpolated* nor *corrupted*, nor have come down to us in a different state from that in which they left the hands of the Evangelists and Apostles, we have the best of reasons to conclude. It will be readily granted, that from the haste or ignorance of transcribers there may be the mistake of a name, a date, a place, or a particular word. This is the case with all the other ancient books I have mentioned, and

in a far greater degree. Yet notwithstanding these errors of the press, as they may be called, we think the purity of the classics sufficient to warrant us to say, that they have not been interpolated nor corrupted; but are still the same as when they were first composed. Internal evidence has great weight. The beauty of composition in general, and the peculiar style of each writer convince the critic that the work is genuine, and all of a piece: it has the seal of the author's mind stamped upon it. Such a peculiarity of manner have the apostles of Jesus Christ; and to imitate them is beyond the capacity of man. Some pieces were in the primitive ages of christianity ascribed to them, of which a few fragments remain: but he who has imbibed the spirit of their writings, if he will compare with the New Testament the works which were falsely attributed to them, will find the difference in every respect as great, as a classical scholar will, between the orations of Cicero, and Pagninus's Latin version of the scriptures. The *homogeneity* of the New Testament (if the word may be permitted) furnishes the strongest proof that it was composed by men of the same spirit, and of the same wisdom; and that there is no foreign mixture.

If besides this, we consider the veneration which the primitive christians had for the writings of the apostles, nothing can be more

unlikely than that they should have a desire to alter them. Their veneration was a sufficient security for their fidelity. But if any of them had entertained a wish to alter the books of the New Testament, it would have been impossible for them to succeed. Copies were speedily multiplied: they were in the hands of christians in all the churches: they were translated early into the different languages spoken by the several nations, among which the gospel was planted: pious men in their religious treatises, quoted passages from them: sects and parties soon arose, and heretics erred from the truth: but all received the same sacred books; and they became a check upon each other, and rendered corruptions and interpolations impossible. Every succeeding age increased the difficulty; and the comparison of the different ancient manuscripts and copies at the present time, does not affect a *single doctrine* of christianity, nor a *single duty*.

In fixing the canon of the New Testament, i. e. in distinguishing the writings of the evangelists and apostles from those of other men, the ancient christians proceeded with the utmost caution: and who would not approve of caution in a matter of so much importance? If a person was receiving a sum of money for you, would you not commend the attention which carefully examined every piece? Such cautious scrutiny was here employed; and no

book was admitted into the volume, till it was ascertained that it was of divine authority, or, in other words, was written by the evangelists and apostles of Christ. Such as were not written by them, (and it could be known by enquiry) were rejected: such as were doubtful they hesitated about, and waited till their doubts were removed: and such as were known to be written by the apostles, they immediately received.— If these very brief hints be duly weighed; and especially if the objectors will take the trouble to consider the subject more fully, they will find a mass of evidence in support of the authenticity, purity, and divine authority of the New Testament, of the existence of which they before had no idea.

SECTION XV.

OBJ. Many of the Advocates for the Religion of Jesus inveigh bitterly against Philosophy, because they know that Christianity cannot bear the strict Scrutiny of her penetrating Eye.

THAT a great outcry has of late been raised by some persons against philosophy; and that men have been taught to regard it as the most hideous monster ever seen on earth, and entreated or commanded to bring swords and spears, and unite for its destruction, is but too

true. Let it cover *them*, for it ought, with merited disgrace: for there is either a lack of wisdom; or else instead of the advancement of religion, they have some worldly interest in view: but let it not be charged to the account of the gospel, and interpreted to its dishonour. Christianity blushes while she hears such advocates pleading her cause; and turns away from them with disgust, lamenting that those who call themselves her children, have not imbibed a larger measure of wisdom and goodness.

Philosophy, true philosophy (for there is false philosophy as well as false religion, and the New Testament condemns both) is highly valuable; it is in all its branches exceedingly useful; and it has contributed in an eminent degree to the improvement and happiness of the human race. Every enlightened christian acknowledges this, and is desirous that philosophy may rapidly proceed in improving every part of her extensive system; and that all her discoveries may be more extensively known. Moses of old wished that all the people of Israel were *prophets*: the disciple of Jesus wishes that all the inhabitants of the earth were *philosophers*. If we except bloated pride, nothing is more opposite or more hostile to christianity than brutish ignorance: sound knowledge, especially of philosophy, as it improves the mental powers, is favourable to the study and reception of the gospel.

Some, or shall I say, *many* of late who call themselves philosophers, have rejected the gospel, and have said that philosophy taught them to reject it : but true philosophy was no more the cause of the rejection, than the sun is the cause of darkness. As it is not every one who lays claim to wisdom that is wise, nor every one who boasts of his integrity that is upright ; so it is not every man who calls himself a philosopher, that has attained to true philosophy. Should a person have even acquired a considerable knowledge of its speculative truths, yet if he hath not the *heart* of a philosopher, he wants the principal part. If christianity be rejected by *him*, it is not to its dishonour.

Did the limits of this essay permit, it could be shewn, that philosophy contains no principles which are hostile to christianity. When viewed in its full extent, and embracing every object of pursuit, the study of mind, of morals, and of nature, christianity does not perceive an enemy, but an humble ally, whose exertions are not injurious, but favourable to her cause. Those who have leisure, are earnestly entreated to study philosophy with wisdom, and to read the New Testament with a pure unbiassed mind : the gospel is not afraid of the result. But how few can find time for so laborious a research ! There is however a more compendious method which they may pursue, so as to obtain a con-

siderable degree of satisfaction on the subject. Let *example* have its due weight. No one will deny Bacon, Newton, Locke, Boyle, Leibnitz, Paschal, and St. Pierre to have been philosophers. They were *christians* too: and may not their belief of its truth, and reception of its principles be considered as no mean argument, that philosophy is not at variance with the gospel; but as its handmaid, conducts the philosopher to Jesus to sit at his feet, and learn heavenly wisdom?

These are some of the most common and weighty objections against the gospel. That there is not all the force in them which deists fondly suppose, the answers given, will shew. Many others might have been mentioned; for the apostles are not like artful men conscious of fraud, who when they see that an objection may be started, are at pains to obviate it: but they go straight forward, and deliver the most revolting principles, and record the most extraordinary actions and events without comment or apology, and leave their book to the free examination of mankind.

The writings of the New Testament are like the works of creation and providence: they carry their evidence along with them; but they furnish matter for abundance of objections.—What is the use of the vast sandy deserts of

Arabia, and Lybia? What good end can be answered by the pestilential winds which blow certain death over them to the unwary traveller? What benefit did devouring earthquakes ever convey to the human race? What wisdom or goodness can you point out in any of these? Though I should be utterly at a loss for an answer, you are yourselves convinced, there is sufficient evidence that the universe was created by a Being infinitely wise, and infinitely good. In the government of the world, how many events occur concerning which Diagoras would say, "If there were a righteous governor who superintends all the affairs of men, would he ever allow such acts of horrid wickedness, as shameless falsehood, and robbery, and perjury at the very altar of Deity to take place, or to pass unnoticed and unrevenged?" But you justly conceive, notwithstanding these objections and difficulties, that, "verily there is a God who judges on the earth."

Let the same rule be observed respecting the gospel; and the christian asks no more. There are difficulties, you say, in some parts of the system, which you cannot solve; and they seem to be contrary to the wisdom, rectitude, and goodness of the Deity. Were this really the case, you perceive that, in arguing from analogy, it is no proof that the christian religion is not from God. Notwithstanding the

difficulties in creation and providence, evidence compels us to acknowledge God as the creator and governor of the world. In like manner if the gospel have evidence in its support equal to the former acknowledged works of God, the difficulties which occur, by no means shake its credit. But the objections against it are far from being so strong, and so difficult to be solved; and much more satisfactory answers may be given, than to these against creation and providence; while the evidence which must from the nature of the subject be of a widely different kind, is so diversified, comprehensive, and full, that no humble enquirer will have reason to say: "God has required me to believe, without giving sufficient proof, that the gospel is a revelation from heaven."

CHAPTER IX.

THE SENTIMENTS AND CONDUCT OF THE DEISTS
BRIEFLY CONSIDERED.

HITHERTO the deist has been the assailant; and has taken up his station within the limits of the kingdom of Jesus Christ. He has demanded a sight of the Redeemer's title to the extensive dominions which he calls his own, and to the subjection of the millions over whom he reigns: and it has been shewn him without hesitation. He has brought forward his objections: and answers have been given. The christian will now advance into the territories of deism, and make the attack in his turn, not however with carnal weapons, but with those spiritual arms which have been in every age "mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds, casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ." 2 Cor. x. He wishes the deist to gird on his armour, and defend himself like a man. Truth is the object for which the christian contends; truth which will direct men how to serve and to please God, and to walk in the path to

eternal felicity. If the deist be acting with consistency, he prefers his own system, because it possesses greater advantages in both these respects; and teaches more clearly and fully how to please God, and to be happy. But if, while he rejects and opposes christianity, he is contented with a religion which leaves him entirely in the dark respecting the most important concerns of man, his conduct will not endure the scrutiny of penetrating and impartial reason.—But let the matter be subjected to a fair trial.

SECTION I.

Deists do not examine Christianity with the Spirit of Men who are searching after Truth.

WHEN men are disputing about trifles, levity may be pardonable: but when the subject of discussion is of infinite importance, a grave and serious frame of mind is highly becoming, and absolutely necessary. The want of it is a hideous blemish. No subjects were ever brought before the tribunal of the human mind, half so important as those of the New Testament: viz. the nature of God, his government, our duty to him, and the eternal state of man in happiness, or in misery. These are things so vast and so weighty, that we may justly say,

the man is not in earnest in his enquiries, who treats them with levity.

But is not this the way, in which christianity has been almost always treated by deists? How few exceptions can be named! Instead of that honesty of disposition which examines with candour, which weighs evidence with impartiality, and which appreciates with fairness the discoveries which the gospel has made, and its numerous additions to the limits of human knowledge on religious subjects, how is it that we seldom discover aught but a mind full of levity or spleen? They hold up christianity to ridicule, and treat it with contempt. They aim at displaying ill-natured wit; and bitter sarcasms issue from their hearts on every occasion. They carp at every trifle, at which it is possible to take exception: they try to find fault with every thing: false allegations are frequently made: in all their discussions, there is an evident hatred of the gospel, which they cannot repress: the *purity of its precepts* seems to give peculiar offence.

There is another thing which still more strongly inclines me to think that deists are not in earnest. They are not at pains to instruct their votaries in the religious and moral principles of their system. They discover zeal enough to draw men away from the gospel: but they can consider this as nothing more, on their own system, than the rooting out of false

principles from the heart. The main object yet remains, namely, the *implanting of good ones*. But what ardour does the deist discover here? What convert can bear witness to your serious assiduity in instructing him in the articles of natural religion? Which of your votaries can say, that you have repeatedly and affectionately exhorted him to a more pious, benevolent, and virtuous life than he led before? Men who neglect these things, whatever they may pretend, are not in earnest in zeal for their system, and in their search for true religion.

When I observe this to be the common spirit of the adversaries of the gospel, I cease to wonder at their rejection of it. Whatever you may say to the contrary, you are not in quest of truth. You appear to be afraid of it, and to dislike it; and to have a wish to be free from its restraints. Your minds are in such a frame, that it is scarcely possible that you will ever be able to arrive at truth. Christianity, from your rejection, suffers no stain; it rather acquires an additional evidence of its divine origin.

SECTION II.

Deists do not seem, even with respect to their own System of Religion, to be in earnest, either as to the Practice or Propagation of it.

IN every country, the mass of the people professes to be of that religion which is established, whatever it may be. Where christianity is established, they call themselves *christians*. But we are not to conclude from hence, that multitudes of them believe its principles, or study to regulate their lives by its precepts. They are no more christians on that account; than they are *philosophers*, because philosophy is cultivated and understood by a great number of persons in the country where they dwell. The argument for or against christianity from the lives of its professors, is not to be taken from such people, but from those who profess to be christians from conviction, and who endeavour to act according to its dictates. While this reasonable request is made for christians, deists have a right to be treated in the same manner; and those only to be considered as deists, who profess to be so from conviction. But with this limitation, are not deists chargeable with neglecting both the practice and the propagation of their religion?

There have been deists in France, and in England, for near a century and a half; and full time has been given for the display of its influence in the lives of its votaries. Natural religion enjoins the exercise of virtue; and it calls its disciples to pray to, and to praise the Deity both in private and in public. Christianity commands the same things, but in a far wider extent; and with additional considerations and instructions. Those who make any credible pretensions to a belief of the gospel have their individual and domestic devotions, and their assemblies for public worship. Whether deists have worshipped God in secret, and with their families, must be left to the decision of their conscience. But concerning their public worship, we are able to form a more accurate judgment. With one solitary exception of very short duration*, it is not known that there has been one worshipping society of deists in England; but the most learned and zealous advocates of the system, as to any outward acknowledgment of the Deity, have lived *as atheists* in the world†. What is called natural

* About twenty years ago, a teacher of christianity who turned deist, set up the worship of God in a chapel in London, and officiated as the *priest of nature*. But the deists soon grew tired of worshipping God; and long before a *lustrum* had revolved, the chapel was shut up.

† The old English deists, with the exception of Lord Herbert of Cherbury and a few others, acted in such a

religion, affords many noble topics of pious conversation. Can those who have associated much with deists, or - can deists themselves testify, that it is their practice to speak of the Deity with devout veneration, and to recommend to others his worship, and the practice of every virtue?—Is it the want of virtue in the world, and the inefficacy of christianity to produce it, that they assign as reasons for preferring natural religion? Do not their writings discover that this is not the case; and that on the contrary, its precepts are too strict,

manner, that if christians had pursued the same line of conduct in respect to deism, as they did in respect to christianity, I would say, “they were mean, canting, hypocritical men.” They wanted honesty. Instead of professing their real sentiments, they called themselves christians, while they did every thing in their power to discredit the gospel. If their principles exposed them to sufferings, why did they not manfully endure them? Christians have always done so. Besides, they stood forth in many instances as the advocates of immorality and vice, and laughed at every thing serious and devout. That portion of the French deists who call themselves Theophilanthropists appears a very superior class of men to both the old French and English deists. They frankly avow their principles: “we are, say they, the votaries of natural religion.” They compose liturgies: they meet for public worship: they offer praise and prayers: they have discourses on the nature of God, and the duties of man. A deist who is seeking in earnest how to please God, and enjoy his favour, is on the road to christianity: “every one who hath heard and learned of the Father cometh unto Christ,” and will thankfully take refuge under the shadow of the gospel.

and the licence it gives to indulgence of appetites and passions too small? If these things be considered, is there not great reason to fear, that many persons quit christianity, and take refuge in deism, that they may be freed from the restraints of the gospel, and have the pleasure to sin by a system*?

Nor has more attention been paid by deists to the *propagation* of their religion. When a man holds principles which he thinks will conduce greatly to the honour of God, and the happiness of mankind, it is his duty to diffuse them to the utmost of his power. Whether he be christian, mahometan, deist, or heathen, the obligation is the same. There have been deists in christendom for a long time past. Some of them were men of learning, of influence, and of authority. That they have shewn a zeal to convert some christians to their way, is true: but if it stop here, what judgment shall we form of its purity? Christians are taught to adore and worship God, and to practise every

* This representation is mournfully confirmed by the zeal discovered not many years ago by some infidels in France, to blot out a future state of existence from the mind. "That death is an eternal sleep," was a favourite maxim; and was publicly affixed on some of the repositories of the dead. What the motive of these men was for rejecting the scripture, is but too evident: they disliked the purity and the punishments of the gospel. Is it harsh to say, that the reason why such men wished to *die* like a dog, was because they wished to *live* like a dog?

virtue.—By such conversions, little is gained to the cause of real goodness: not a new motive is suggested to amend their character. Whether deists are at pains by means of *elementary books* to instruct their families in the principles of natural religion, and to press the observances of its precepts by the motives it suggests, must be left to their own minds to determine.

But there are two ways in which true zeal would naturally display itself, in neither of which, however, does it appear. There is a great number of *vicious, immoral persons* in France and England, who act contrary to reason, and discover by their habitual behaviour an utter contempt of the Supreme Being. Whoever heard of deists using their endeavours to bring these sinners to repentance, and reclaim them from their vicious courses? There is another class of men who have long been calling for the benevolent aid of the deist's zeal. A considerable portion of the globe is filled with *heathen idolaters*, whose religion they must consider as dishonourable to the Deity, and debasing to themselves. Deism they regard as the best religion, the most pleasing to God, and the most safe and happy for man. But who ever heard of *a mission of deists* to teach the blinded votaries of pagan idolatry, the knowledge of the true God, the creator and governor of the world? It does not appear from their writings, that such a thought ever

entered a deist's mind. So general a want of zeal in these respects is very remarkable. Does it not lead to a suspicion, that there is something amiss in the system, or in the men who hold it; that either it does not communicate a spirit of love, or that they do not feel it; or that both may be combined as a cause?

SECTION III.

How little the Enemies of Christianity have been able to say against it, merits Notice.

SINCE the very day that Jesus Christ began to preach, the gospel has been violently opposed: and the opposers have sought to justify themselves in their rejection of it. The Jews did every thing that men could, to discover its falsehood; for their all depended on the discovery. But what did they produce which merits notice?—Nor were the heathens less zealous on the same side. Rulers, priests, and philosophers had each their peculiar cause of quarrel with the gospel: and when the interests of a body of men are at stake, talents have never been wanting to support their cause, even in the rudest age. But were they more successful than the Jews? If the writings of some be lost, the substance of others remains: but they ex-

hibit nothing formidable or subversive of its truth. From the *earliest* adversaries we may expect the strongest arguments against it, as their means of refutation were more easy. But instead of taking the same ground with adversaries of the last century, Celsus, one of the first writers against christianity, allows that Christ and his apostles did really perform the miracles to which they laid claim. A few ages afterwards, when the Jews composed their Talmuds, would they not put into them whatever could fortify their nation against the gospel: but what do they contain that can confute it? It is not without triumph, that the christian must view the feeble darts both of the ancient Jews and heathens.

In modern times the adversaries of christianity * have assumed a bolder attitude. Their

* VOLNEY, a French infidel writer, denies that there ever was such a person as Jesus Christ. Those who understand the nature of moral evidence, and the very full measure of it for the existence of Christ, must acknowledge, that for groundlessness and presumption, Volney's sentiment stands alone, among all the bold and daring things that were ever spoken by any of the sons of men. If he do not mean to sport with his brethren, and try how far their credulity will go, but is really in earnest in his assertion, I shall be supported by every sober mind in averring, that Bedlam is a habitation for people who have a hundred times more reason: and that his *mania* is both so peculiar and so inveterate, that no place has yet been erected fit for the abode of an unhappy man, who to such a total derangement, adds a whole chaos of absurdity.

elder brethren who lived near the christian æra, had as perfect a hatred of the gospel : some of them were high in rank and office : and the civil authority with which they were vested, enabled them the better to discover the truth ; but after all, they were obliged to acknowledge the reality of the miracles of the New Testament. Of late, the adversaries deny them, with a high tone of assurance. Some have professed to demonstrate that miracles are impossible : others have attempted to expose the futility or falsehood of particular passages : and multitudes have searched for contradictions, objections, and difficulties, in the scriptures : and they have plentifully bestrewed their compositions with ridicule and sarcasm. Some of these adversaries are men of talents and learning ; while others possess neither, and have nothing to recommend them, but a hatred of the gospel. But what have all these men been able to say against it ? The christian who has read extensively on the subject, will be gratified to see how easily and satisfactorily their objections have been answered ; how wide of the mark their bitter arrows have flown ; how little they have been able to invalidate the grand evidences for christianity ; and how entire and firm the building remains, after all their efforts to overthrow it. Nor indeed are the objections so numerous, as one ignorant of the controversy would suppose :

for although the writings of deists be greatly multiplied, we find often little else but the objections made by former authors, again presented to view. Persons who would attack the works of creation and providence, would be able to say more against them, and in a more forcible way, than has been said against divine revelation.

SECTION IV.

From a Spirit of Opposition to the Gospel, and in order to destroy its Credibility, Deists run into the grossest Absurdities.

WHEN men, in order to oppose successfully a system which they dislike, run into the grossest absurdities; and believe any thing however improbable which has a tendency to discredit it, there is some reason to conclude that the system is true: at any rate, there is the strongest reason to believe that they are wrong. How prominent is this feature in deists, where *christianity* is concerned! Many of them are men of much erudition, of good sense, and of sound judgment: but there is a certain fatuity *quoad hoc*, which every reader of the controversy must have observed. The religion of the ancient heathens of Greece and Rome was a

heterogeneous mass of idolatry, superstition, impurity, and barbarity. But how highly do infidels extol it! Gibbon who ranks among the *Pontifices Maximi* of infidelity, always speaks of it with approbation, and dignifies it with the title of “*the elegant mythology of the Greeks.*” The Koran contains a profusion of ridiculous ceremonies and unmeaning observances, and various precepts contrary to reason and goodness: but the prophet of Mecca has won the good graces of unbelievers; and the most *civil* things are said of Mahomet and his religion. But why? He was an *enemy to the gospel* of Christ. Modern paganism likewise finds many panegyrists among them. The religion of Hindostan is well known to be a chaos of idolatry, lewdness, and cruelty: and the Hindoos, by the testimony of the most competent judges, are among the most dishonest, lewd, false, and deceitful people on the face of the earth. But how highly have they been extolled by deistical writers! If you give credit to the Abbe Raynal and his coadjutors, you would suppose their religion the essence of wisdom and purity, and its votaries the patterns of every virtue. But on what account do they thus misrepresent the truth? Christianity will suffer by the comparison; and the religion of Brahma appear superior to the religion of Jesus.—The chronology of the scriptures agrees with the most authentic ancient histories, with appearances in nature,

with the invention of arts and sciences; and it is confirmed by an accurate investigation of the records of nations. But from a spirit of pride, the Egyptians, the Chinese, and the Hindoos invented a chronology reaching back hundreds of thousands, nay millions of years. The reign of some of the monarchs lasted for many thousands. Deists drink down the enchanted cup with avidity, and are intoxicated with delight. But how is it, that sensible men can for a moment give credit to such palpable absurdities? Because the *credibility of the gospel* will be hereby ruined.—When a christian performs eminent acts of goodness, infidels insinuate that there is just cause to suspect him of hypocrisy. If a man of another creed do the same things, though in an inferior degree, he and his religion are exalted to the skies: and to hint a suspicion that he may be a hypocrite, is an unpardonable crime. Because christianity has teachers of religion, all her ministers are bitterly inveighed against as *ignorant* or *artful* priests; destitute of every good principle. Let bad men who assume the office, be covered with as heavy a load of infamy as you please. But why this enmity against the good ones, who not only teach but practise virtue, and who along with christianity illustrate all the principles, and enforce all the precepts of *natural* religion as extensively, and earnestly, and constantly as ever a deist did? They are ministers

of the gospel, and that is crime enough: every thing connected with it is an object of dislike.

The deist is entreated to consider the conduct of his fathers and brethren, with an unbiassed mind. It is painful to be compelled to bring such heavy charges against a body of men: but can he contradict them? Does it not appear, as if *all* means were thought lawful against the christian religion; and that it must be condemned *per fas & nefas*? But does it not likewise shew, that little reliance is to be placed on men, who will employ such methods to obtain their end; and that they seem to feel a consciousness, that their cause is not so good as they would wish the world to believe?

SECTION V.

The System of the Deists does not supply the Place of the Gospel, nor make suitable and sufficient Provision for the Happiness of Man.

THE gospel clearly conveys to us the knowledge of every thing that is necessary to our duty and happiness. The nature of God, the manner of worshipping him, the way of acceptance with him, the various parts of duty, the consolations of his promises, and a future state

of reward and punishment are fully and plainly revealed; and all the satisfaction which it is reasonable for us to expect, is given. These the deist rejects. It is natural then to conclude that he has something better to put in their place; and that if he rob us of these by withdrawing our hearts from the gospel, he can furnish more satisfactory discoveries of divine truth, and more ample consolations. But what is that system of religion which is to stand in the gospel's room?

It may be justly remarked, that the deist's only care has too often been to eradicate the belief of the gospel from the heart: and when that object has been attained, no pains were taken to instil other principles; but as if every thing had then been done, the person was left without any fixed principles to direct him. This conduct certainly merits the severest reprehension: and it may justly be said, that what influences such a zealot, is not the love of truth or human happiness, but a hatred of christianity. But let us suppose a deist disposed to teach the whole of his system; what is there in it that can supply the place of the gospel? What assurance can you give me, O deist, that God will hold friendly intercourse with man? When I wish to engage in worship, I seek "access through Christ by one spirit unto the Father." But how do *you* say I am to worship God? What particular direc-

tions can you give me; and what assurance that my worship shall be favourably received? The New Testament informs me, that I may hope for reconciliation with God, whom I have offended, through the mediation of Jesus Christ: but this doctrine you reject. How shall I then obtain the pardon of my sins, and be admitted into the friendship of God? Tell me, deist, for the subject is of the last importance to my peace of mind. "Repent and reform your life; and God will forgive you, and be your friend." What dependence may I place on your assertions? Besides, how often, and how long, and for what sins will *repentance* suffice? I am conscious, that every duty which I perform, is attended with imperfections: what assurance can you give me that it will be accepted? I feel much consolation from the prospects, and hopes of that state of blessedness, which the gospel has encouraged the disciples of Jesus to look for after death. But you say that the gospel is an imposture; and you wish to cut off all my expectations. But what do you put in its place? You speak also of a future state: but who ever saw it? No one, according to your system, ever came down from heaven to reveal it: all rests on the reasoning of man. But can man by reasoning inform me, what the happiness is, how long it will endure, and whether it may not be lost? The gospel affords me resignation and comfort

amidst the sufferings of this present life, from the consideration “that all things work together for good to them that love God: and that our light afflictions work out for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.” All these I must reject, if I attend to you. But where are the consolations you can furnish in their place? There are no declarations of God: I must rest in the assertions and reasonings of man: but will these suffice?

In all these things, deist, you offer me nothing beyond conjecture or a low degree of probability. It *may be*: but it *may not be*. You can present nothing like certainty and assurance. And is this an adequate support? Is this sufficient to animate hope, and direct the life? Is it for this, that the christian is to forsake the gospel, which is a “lamp to his feet, and a light to his paths?” Shall he bid adieu to what he justly accounts certainty, for a system which even the deist cannot say, rises higher than *peradventure*?—Brief hints must suffice, where a more extended consideration is almost necessary to throw the full blaze of light on the subject; a subject which every one who rejects christianity, is loudly called on for his own satisfaction, to examine with the most serious attention.

SECTION VI.

There is good Reason to conclude, that the System of Natural Religion, which the Deists profess to hold, is derived from the New Testament.

“ A DIVINE REVELATION is needless,” says the deist: “ reason will teach men all necessary truths :” and in proof, he refers to the system of natural religion which he has drawn up. But is there no ground to deny your assertion, and to charge you with having stolen your system from the scriptures? What it contains, may in general be called the principles of natural religion : but the question is, “ where did the deist learn them? Was it from reason, or from Christ? That it was not from reason, the history of mankind affords evidence which it will not be easy to refute.

The ancient philosophers of Greece and Rome, were men of the first talents: they spent their days in study: they frequently directed their attention to the most important subjects: and they wrote many books. But shew me their system of natural religion? Here and there a fine sentiment is to be found, but surrounded by pages of gross error: each diamond is hid under mountains of rubbish; or

shall we rather say, it sparkles from a dung-hill. One of the first modern deists in England attempted to compile a system out of all these just ideas. But had he placed by their side, the heaps of rubbish from which they were extracted, had he brought forward the superstition, the absurdity, and the idolatry with which they stood connected in the original authors, it would have appeared, that however beautiful a whole they make in his hands, the detached sentiments were of no use in theirs. The general system of the wisest of them, and their practice too, was abject superstition, and gross idolatry. Nor have modern heathens been more successful. Hindostan is a country highly civilized: and its progress in useful arts is universally acknowledged. The Bramins are highly extolled for their learning, and for the recondite wisdom which is contained in their *shasters*. China has been still more loudly celebrated for its improvements in science, as well as in arts, and for the superior wisdom of its institutions: and it has had also its philosophers and its priests. These two countries have been so long in a state of civilization, as to unite in themselves the discoveries both of ancient and modern times. Surely then we may look for the purest system of natural religion from them. But instead of this, the grossest idolatry reigns in both: the learned

support it by their influence; and they as well as the ignorant are the slaves of the most abject and degrading superstition.

If such be the state of the ancient and modern nations, which have had reason for their guide, how comes it to pass that European deists are so much superior to them in the knowledge of natural religion? Is it because deists now are superior in talents? This you dare not assert. Whence is it that reason, which would not be wooed by them, is so kind to you? Assign the cause. You will not. It is no other than this: you live where the light of the gospel shines; and from it you have derived your knowledge of natural religion.—“I am under no obligation to the New Testament. I never read so much of the book, as to be able to form any system from it.” This may be true; but recollect, that all the religious sentiments which float on the minds of those with whom you associate, and all the just and good ideas on moral subjects which you have received from your very childhood, all originate in the sacred scriptures. You are like a man in a cloudy day, who denies that the light, which illuminates the path in which he walks and every object around, proceeds from the sun, because he does not see his face.

SECTION VII.

A Comparison between the most eminent Deists, and Christians, as to their Temper, and Conduct in Life.

THE best and fairest trial of the goodness of principles is by their moral influence on disposition and conduct. As the deist conceives his religion to be superior to christianity, it must make better men, and produce lives of more eminent purity and goodness. I make no account of that licentious herd professing deism, who give a full swing to every appetite and every passion which craves indulgence; and say their religion warrants such gratifications: every infidel of character and honour must, I am sure, disown them as his brethren. What I have in view is, (will it not throw light on the controversy?) to compare the lives of the most noted deists with those of the most zealous christians.

In Peter and Paul and John, disciples of Jesus, of whose principles and conduct brief notices are given in the New Testament, there is an unwearied study to cultivate humility, meekness, compassion, forgiveness of injuries, beneficence, and the returning of good for evil. There is a constant endeavour to please God, and to be devoted to him. There is a constant endeavour to do good to men, *to all* without

distinction of country or religion, to instruct them, to make them holy, and to make them happy. For the attainment of these ends, they submit to the greatest hardships, and sufferings, and to death.

Bring forward into the field of comparison the most famous votaries of deism, Celsus, and Porphyry; or men better known, Voltaire, Rousseau, Diderot, D'Alembert, Hume, and Gibbon. Do *they* display such sanctity of character, such purity of heart, such a veneration for the Supreme Being, such disinterested and ardent love to men, and such sacrifices of their own safety and comfort for the happiness of others? Two of these chiefs in the camp of deism, Gibbon and Rousseau, have written their own memoirs: let them be compared with the lives of Peter and John. Every christian may triumph at the result; and every deist blush. In the brilliant memoirs of the eloquent historian of *the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, he must be a quick-sighted reader, who can perceive a noble or dignified sentiment, or a disinterested or benevolent principle of conduct from beginning to end. *Self* is the idol to whom a constant adoration is paid. How different the tenor of this man's thoughts, affections, and dispositions, from that of Paul of Tarsus! "For me," says he, "to live is Christ. No man liveth to himself: but whether we live, we live to the Lord. Herein do I ex-

ercise myself, to keep a conscience void of offence both towards God, and towards man. I endure all things for the elect's sake." From *the confessions* of Rousseau, we find that his life was polluted with vices, and his heart defiled with the indulgence of evil passions to an extreme degree. Will his temper and conduct bear a comparison with the apostle John, who practised the doctrine which he taught, and whose doctrine is, "he that hateth his brother is a murderer." "God is love; and he that dwelleth in love, dwelleth in God, and God in him." "Hereby we know that we are passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren."

SECTION VIII.

The most eminent Deists and Christians compared, as to their Views and Hopes at the Approach of Death.

WHETHER principles be good and efficacious or not, will be best discovered in the season of distress: and the more bitter the distress, the brighter will the discovery be. For bitterness, no season can be compared to that, in which man perceives the near approach of death. He deserves not the name of a philosopher; he argues and feels not as a man of reason, who does

not consider *that* as one of the most awful portions of human existence, in which the soul is about to pass from a state of probation, into a state of retribution. None, therefore, can be more proper to try men's principles, and the influence which they produce. Let the deist take a view of his brethren in this solemn hour of trial, and the christian of his; and let the goodness of their principles be determined by the result.

Deists speak in the highest terms of the *ancient* heathens: behold the last hours of one who is celebrated by historians for his eminent virtues. Germanicus at the approach of death called together his friends: and suspecting, though without evidence, that Piso and Plancina had shortened his days by poison or witchcraft, he spends his dying moments in pressing them to take revenge, in directing them how it might be accomplished, and in binding them by an oath to do it. In addition he thus speaks; "Had I died by the decree of fate, I should have had just cause of resentment against the gods for hurrying me away from my parents, my wife, and my children, in the flower of my age, by an untimely death*." At no great distance of time and place, Stephen the first martyr for Jesus presents us with the last hour

* Tacitus, b. ii.

of a christian. While his unrelenting murderers were crushing his body with stones, he lifted up his eyes to heaven, and having implored his Saviour to receive his departing soul, he closes life with these words on his lips, "Lord, lay not this sin to their charge."

But perhaps more may be expected from *modern* deists. History records the example of one, a man of talents, a wit, a courtier, who at the approach of death looked round for the support of deism in that hour, but could find none: and his tortured soul sought refuge in the consolations of the gospel. In bitter agonies he warned others against the fascinating delusions of infidelity; and cried to Jesus the Saviour of sinners for mercy. In this manner died the Earl of Rochester. Favour me, deists, with an instance of a christian at the close of life crying out against the gospel as a system which had led him on to vice and misery, and having recourse to deism for relief and consolation in that awful season. You cannot. "But did not others," you say, "retain their principles to the last?" They did: and let us examine their tendency, their strength, and their influence on the most eminent unbelievers. Of Voltaire's death various accounts have been given: His friends say that he remained steadfast in his infidelity to the last; but they mention no grand sentiments or solemn truths, which his

dying moments furnished for the instruction of mankind. Some of the Roman Catholics assert that he died in horrors of conscience : but it would be unfair to rest evidence on an uncertainty. The manner of Rousseau's death accords with his former ideas, when he had represented the human race assembled on the ruins of the world ; and after narrating the history of his life challenges any one of them to say, *I am better than that man*. Diderot spent his last hours in decyphering riddles. Hume, according to the testimony of a brother deist, expressed no fears of dying, was cheerful, joked about crossing Styx in Charon's boat, and consoled himself with the consideration that his fame was high and rising, that he could not expect to leave his brother's family in more comfortable circumstances, and that by dying at the age of sixty-five, he only cut off a few years of infirmities. Gibbon on the evening before his death sought consolation amidst his afflictions, in computing that he might still live twenty years.

I have brought forward the best things which deism can produce : but these *tranquil* deaths more deeply impress my mind, and furnish more powerful evidence against deism, than all the horrors which Voltaire is said to have endured. We have here all the strength and consolations of the infidel system presented to

view. But what are they? The levity of Diderot, and the pride of Rousseau, all must condemn as highly unbecoming. But what is there in the dying hours of those calm philosophical deists, Hume, and Gibbon, to recommend infidelity, or to shake the credit of the gospel? No one acquainted with human nature can say, that there is any force in the considerations which they adduce, to reconcile the mind to death. They may amuse a man who is in health, and at his ease; but they can give no rational support in the near views of his decease. Besides, futurity is as much out of sight, with these men, as if death were eternal sleep.

But the dreadful blank in the departing deist's soul will appear still more striking, if we place over against it, the sentiments and deportment of a christian in the views of death. Paul of Tarsus who had deeply imbibed the spirit of the gospel, amidst bonds and imprisonment, and in the prospects of his dissolution thus expresses the sentiments of his heart; "I desire to depart and to be with Christ, which is far better." With pleasing reflections on the past he cries, "I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith." Delighted with the prospects of futurity, he exclaims with exultation; "Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown

of righteousness, which the Lord the righteous Judge will give unto me ; and not to me only, but to all them that love his appearing." 2 Tim.

iv. Calm and unmoved on the verge of both worlds, he thus expresses the language of a stedfast faith: " I know whom I have believed, and I am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed to him, against that day. 2 Tim. i. 12." Millions of christians have died with the same sentiments, and with equal hope and joy : instances still occur from day to day. Let the man who quits the society of christians for the camp of infidels, compare and judge.

There is a remarkable circumstance which ought not to pass unnoticed, and of which the adversaries of the gospel are bound to give a satisfactory account. I never heard of a modern deist who *was desirous to die*, that he might share the *blessings of immortality*. Can you produce an instance ? Bring it forth, for it is a stranger upon earth. If you cannot ; assign the reason. Many christians have longed " to be absent from the body, and present with the Lord : " but why does the deist never express a desire to quit this life for the happiness of futurity, nor utter the language of joy in the prospect of removing from a present state ? Is the fault in *him*, or in the system,

or in both? A great fault somewhere there must certainly be.

This rapid glance of your sentiments has been taken with frankness; but has not been carried beyond the bounds of truth and decency. The bitterness, the ridicule, the buffoonery, the levity, the harsh names, which your writers have so frequently used, would ill become a disciple of Jesus, whose aim is, in the spirit of love, to conduct you to truth and eternal happiness. On a review of the chapter, can you really think, O deists, that the christian would be warranted to give up his religion for yours? What improvement would he receive as to knowledge, virtue, and felicity? Can you really urge him with earnestness to quit the camp of Jesus, and come over to you? Would it not be, as if an Egyptian of old had pressed an Israelite to forsake the light of the land of Goshen, and to go and take up his abode amidst the gloom of that palpable darkness which enveloped his countrymen. Besides, from the life and conversation of the mass of your brethren, the most eminent for talents and learning not excepted, is there no ground for the christian to fear, that instead of wishing to bring persons over from a worse religion to a better, your aim is rather to teach them to

throw off the restraints of religion altogether, and to leave those who become your converts, to the indulgence of every appetite and passion without controul? From an examination of your system and your manners, the christian must be better pleased with his own, and clearly perceive that the engines you employ for its ruin do not shake the sacred structure: and he must be more fully convinced that they are miserable indeed, who have only the principles of *your* religion for their support.

CHAPTER X.

SOME MISCELLANEOUS CONSIDERATIONS, AND
CONCLUSION.

THE various parts of the evidence for christianity, on which it was intended to insist, have now been brought forth to view. The principles which the gospel contains; the considerations which its contents suggest; the testimony of the apostles; the stupendous miracles; the numerous predictions; and the wonderful success of the christian religion, have opened their treasures, and placed their golden chain of arguments before our eyes. The objections of deists have been weighed in the balance of the sanctuary; and the numerous and essential defects of their system pointed out. The reader who has attentively considered these things, and balanced them impartially in his mind, must at least allow, that there never was a *false* religion which could adduce so many things in its behalf as the gospel of Christ. But can he say, that there ever was a *true* religion, which could boast of more abundant proofs of its divine authority? Let him try what he can bring forward in defence of deism; and see if it will admit of as ample proof.—Besides the regular chain of evidence, there are detached

considerations, which, in addition to the former, have no small degree of force. Were there room, many of these might be presented to view: a specimen only shall be given, by which a judgment may be formed of the rest.

SECTION I.

The Harmony of the different Parts of the Evidence for Christianity.

A BRIEF sketch has been given of the principal arguments in favour of the christian religion: and we have travelled together over an extensive and widely diversified field. One thing has been apparent to all, that the arguments are many in number; the sources from which they are derived, various; and of very different kinds, and from different quarters. But what is truly remarkable, while all bear upon the same point, all do harmoniously tend to throw light on each other, and to give each other additional weight: there is not a single exception. The doctrines of christianity are very numerous, and many of them of a very remarkable kind; such indeed as were never heard of, nor known before. But among all these doctrines, there is the most perfect harmony. The gospel contains likewise the most exten-

sive system of moral precepts that was ever given. Some of these too were new, and had no place in the pages of heathen moralists: but they perfectly accord one with another: there is not the slightest jarring among them. The doctrines and precepts likewise entirely harmonize. The latter rise out of the former in the most natural manner, as the branches from the stock: and all together form one beautiful and fruitful tree, under the shadow of which we repose with pleasure, and in safety. In the external evidence we discover the same properties. There is a pleasing harmony among the miracles: one does not oppose another. The same harmony we perceive in the prophecies: there is no contradiction; but one concordant whole, forming a well-shaped body with all its members. Besides this, all the external evidences are in perfect harmony with each other; when we examine them one by one, in their relation to each other, we see that they all agree and all strengthen each other. But in addition to these, there is also a harmony between the external and internal arguments which mutually strengthen one another; each would be incomplete of itself; but together, they form one harmonious whole: they are like the links of a chain, which enclosed in each other, communicate their strength to the whole, and act as one power with united energy.

If christianity were not from God, could this possibly be the case? Should we not find one argument opposing another, one source of evidence counteracting another, and some utterly unconnected with the rest, or destroying their force? But here is a harmonious whole, composed of very various parts; and the different colours render the piece more beautiful and interesting. Or shall we compare it to a complicated machine, the numerous parts of which have a dependence on each other, but where all the parts agree, and answer the end designed, and perform the service which the maker intended and promised. This merits the closest attention of those who reject the gospel.

SECTION II.

Every Man of a good Disposition must wish the Gospel to be true.

TELL me, deist, do you wish christianity to be the true religion? Let your answer be sincere. Its principles so noble and divine; its precepts so pure; the happiness it proposes, so exalted, so full, and so lasting; its powerful and universal tendency to purify human nature from every thing mean and vile, and to render it dignified, holy and blessed; its affectionate

care to console amidst the sorrows of life, and to administer support in death; and the delightful prospects it affords of a future and never-ending state of felicity; these are all so perfectly excellent, and so desirable, that every man of a good heart must wish the gospel to be true. Nothing but want of evidence can withhold him from embracing it. In such a case the sincere and humble enquirer would quit it with the most poignant sorrow; and account it an irreparable loss, that so admirable a system was destitute of evidence. It would be the bitterest day of his life.

But the man who, after examining its nature and evidence, rejects it with indifference or contempt, discovers a dreadful want of moral sentiment and feeling: his wishes are not in favour of the gospel. The heart must be shockingly depraved, which can be *indifferent*, where duty and happiness come so close to the soul. But he who pronounces the book an imposture, and throws it away with *exultation and joy*, gives too much reason to fear, that he is conscious of sentiments and practices which the gospel condemns; and he discovers dispositions to which a name adequate to their nature shall not, and perhaps cannot be given. He is like a person who with rapture bids a final adieu to the cheering beams of the sun, that he may shut himself up in eternal darkness.

SECTION III.

The Temper required by the New Testament in those who examine the Evidences of Christianity.

WHILE the pagan religion will not bear examination for a moment; while the Koran is afraid of it and discourages it, christianity demands and urges examination as the only path which leads to genuine faith. The fairness it displays, and the counsels it delivers on this point, are no inconsiderable presumptive arguments in its favour.

Do you wish to examine the claims of the gospel? Jesus forbids you to live in the *practice of vice*, and assigns *the love of sin* as one cause of men's rejecting his religion. He tells you that the *indulgence of sensual pleasure* is hostile to the soul, and renders it averse to the reception of the truth. He condemns *avarice* as degrading to the mind, and producing a temper opposite and inimical to the gospel. He warns you against *pride* and *ambition*, as destructive to the love of pure religion. He cautions against *prejudice*, as an inveterate enemy to the discovery of truth; and against *precipitation of judgment*, as leaving the mind unfurnished with evidence, and unqualified for determination.

How much *these* corrupt the heart, and blind the understanding, is well known to every observer of human nature: they must consequently unfit the mind for a fair investigation of truth. If the gospel condemn them, and desire, nay and enjoin the person who comes to examine its claims, to throw them aside, does it not shew that it wishes to take no one by surprise, and to have no convert from wrong motives, or a defective investigation; and that it is neither ashamed nor afraid of being put to the severest test, by such as are best qualified to judge of its claims?

The soul being freed from these impediments, you are required to come to the interesting task with such dispositions as have the most powerful tendency to enable you to judge aright. The doctrine of Jesus says to you, “examine the New Testament with *a serious frame* of mind. The subject is infinitely important: and your happiness through all eternity depends on the result. Let levity be banished from the soul: it renders you unmeet for the arduous office. Bring with you an *ardent desire* to know the truth: let your mind be open to conviction. *Embrace the truth* wherever it is found, and whatever the consequences may be: and wherever it may lead you, follow it on from step to step, till you attain the whole, and reach the boundary. Let *impartiality* guide you in all your researches.

Come clothed with *humility*; ‘for God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace to the humble.’ Let *diffidence* in your own judgment lead to repeated examination. Bring a *pure heart*: seek to have it cleansed from every sinful passion; for passion blinds the eyes, and stops the ears of the soul, so that truth can neither be seen nor heard. *Act* according to the convictions of conscience: whatever seems a duty, do: whatever is evil, shun. Let your heart and life be under the regulation of what appears the divine will; and daily cultivate the love of God and man. This is the path which conducts to the possession of truth. ‘If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself.’ John vii. 17. And as every good and perfect gift cometh down from the Father of Lights, present the most fervent supplications to him, that he would inspire your mind with divine wisdom, and preserve you from the hateful influence of error, and enable you to discover the truth, and incline your heart to embrace it with the most devout affection.”

Such are the counsels which Jesus gives, such the injunctions he lays upon you. But is this the method he would recommend, if his design were to deceive you? These are not the words of a deceiver: on the contrary, is there not a consciousness that he is leading you in

the path to divine truth? With the ideas of moral order which have been suggested, is it possible for us to form a different judgment? This consideration must have much weight on every ingenuous mind. But it will have the best, the intended effect, if it lead you to examine the gospel with the temper he requires; as the consequence will be the profession of one of the first disciples; "Lord to whom shall we come but to thee? Thou hast the words of eternal life."

SECTION IV.

The Truth of the Christian Religion believed by those who have spent all their Days in studying the New Testament.

THERE is not a book in the world which has undergone so strict a scrutiny as the New Testament. It has been examined by its enemies; and it has been examined by its friends. Ten thousands of the teachers of christianity have spent a long succession of laborious years in searching into its contents: and they have written in its defence. They have displayed their belief of its truth by a life formed on its precepts, and animated by its principles: and they have died with a lively faith of its promises, rejoicing in its consolations, and ex-

pressing a cheerful hope of the blessedness which it engages to bestow in a future state.

This fact is recommended to the consideration of deists. Will they say, "These men were paid for their faith: by that craft they had their living: there is little credit due to their testimony?" That there have been too many professing to be teachers of christianity, who entered on the office solely for the loaves and the fishes, and who acted as mere men of the world, and sometimes as men of vice, must be acknowledged: and where a lure has been held out to ambition and avarice, this is not to be wondered at. To *their* testimony not a grain of credit is due: let them be held in that contempt which their profaneness merits. But at the same time it will be granted, by all whom incurable prejudice has not blinded, that great numbers of the ministers of the gospel have been among the most respectable characters in society. They have exhibited in the whole tenor of their conduct, integrity, sanctity, and goodness; and they have spent their time and employed their talents in doing good to their fellow creatures, and diffusing virtue and happiness around them. All the temporal remuneration which many of them had, was a scanty pittance, scarcely sufficient to procure a humble subsistence from day to day. Can it be said that these men had very powerful temptations to deceive the world? With such discouraging

prospects they entered on their office, and they continued in it till their dying hour : and when they gave up the ghost, they expressed the fullest approbation of their employment, and recommended the gospel to their family and friends, as the best inheritance. It must be allowed that none understood christianity so well as they : and in their intercourse with mankind, they gave as strong proofs that they were upright and conscientious men, as were ever given by any of the sons of Adam. Had they been conscious that the gospel was not true, some of them would have come forward and avowed the imposture, and warned men against it. Or if they were ashamed or afraid to do that, and to relinquish their office, death is the hour of honesty : and as they were soon to quit the world, and to be hidden in the grave ; and none could upbraid them for their confession, would not some of the best of them have *then* disclosed the imposture ? But so far is this from having been the case, the more pious they were, the more firm was their belief of the divinity of the christian religion ; and the more lively, in the hour of death, their hope of its eternal joys. This has been uniformly the result, not at one time, and at one place only, but in every country and in every age, and among every sect of christians without distinction.

Give this subject, deists, your serious atten-

tion. Judge of the character and testimony of these men, as you would on other subjects with equal evidence. If in every thing else they shew themselves men of intelligence and men of integrity, you have no just reason to suspect them of disingenuity on this one point. The evidence will amount to this, that christianity has been accounted true by the men who were best qualified to judge of its claims to truth and a divine origin. The measure of evidence will be increased, if you take into your view, that thousands of christian ministers for the sake of the gospel have suffered the loss of all things ; and have submitted to want, to exile, to imprisonment, and to martyrdom in its most horrid forms.

Thus have I endeavoured to place before your eyes, the evidences of the christian religion. Remember *that by the christian religion I mean, the system of truth which is contained in the New Testament*. The additions made to christianity, whether by individuals, or by bodies of men calling themselves the church, are destitute of all claim to divine truth ; and it would be as great an absurdity to consider them as a part of christianity, as it would be to add the Koran to the New Testament, and to account its contents as part of the religion of Jesus Christ, and of equal validity with the

writings of the apostles. When the witnesses of the life and death of Christ died, the age of inspiration ceased, for God had revealed by them every truth which it was needful for men to know: and whatever things have been added since, are to be looked upon but as the opinions of fallible men, without weight and without authority. Let all such additions be swept away as useless rubbish, and as noisome dung which have defiled the sanctuary of God.

CONCLUSION.

HAVING thus briefly, and I hope I may add, with fairness and candour, stated the evidence of the divine authority of the New Testament, permit one with all the ardour of heart-felt affection to intreat you, my dear friends, to read it again and again, and weigh these arguments in the balance of impartial reason. Should any of you, notwithstanding all this evidence, reject the New Testament as an imposture;—before you throw the sacred book away, consider the following passages, in which it announces the mournful doom of those who will not receive Jesus as the Saviour of sinners.

Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature: he that believeth and is baptized shall be saved, but he that believeth not shall be condemned. Mark xvi. 15, 16. *He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life; but he that believeth not the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on him.* John iii. 36.

Neither is there salvation in any other; for there is none other name given among men whereby we must be saved. Acts iv. 12. *The Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels in flaming fire, taking vengeance on them who know not God and obey not the gospel of our*

Lord Jesus Christ, who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power; when he shall come to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired in all them that believe. 2 Thes. i. 7, 8, 9, 10. Such are the declarations of this book concerning those who reject it in unbelief: and on a supposition of its divine authority, they are both natural and just. For if “God has so loved the world, as to give his only begotten son unto it, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life,” not to receive him must be the greatest of all sins; and must involve in it the highest degree of disobedience, ingratitude, and contempt. The unhappy men have refused the only method of obtaining happiness; and with unhallowed hands have shut the gates of mercy against themselves: and when on entering the eternal world, they are cast off by God, and feel that sense of his displeasure which their iniquities have merited; and are left under the full dominion of their evil passions, such a spectacle of misery will be presented, as no words can describe, and no heart conceive.

Should a candid reader say, “I was a deist, but I am now convinced that Jesus is the Christ:” remember, my friend, that a bare profession will avail nothing: it is necessary that the principles of the gospel should be

written on your heart, and that its precepts should mould your temper and direct your conduct; so that you may be entirely under its influence, and able to say with a disciple of old, "Christ liveth in me."

In order to produce this effect, there is required the energy of a higher power than man's. Jesus, when speaking on the subject, says, "Except a man be born again of the Spirit, he cannot see the kingdom of God." John iii. 5. And, in chap. vi. 44, "no man can come unto me, except the Father who hath sent me draw him." By the depravity of human nature this is become absolutely necessary: and God who made man at first holy and happy, promises and delights to bestow that grace which renews Him in the spirit of his mind, and inclines his heart to embrace Jesus Christ "as made of God unto him, wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption." 1 Cor. i. 30. This doctrine so humiliating to pride, runs through the whole of the New Testament, and is designed to lead the person who is convinced of the guilt of his unbelief, to fall down before God in prayer, and address him in such words as these: "God be merciful to me a sinner. Send forth thy light and thy truth, and let them lead me and guide me. Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me." To animate you with the hope of success, Jesus

Christ has said, "Ask and it shall be given you, seek and ye shall find, knock and it shall be opened unto you: for every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened." Matt. vii. 7, 8. And "If ye men being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children; how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him." Luke xi. 13.

Having received the blessing, and "being in Christ, you are made a new creature: old things are passed away, behold all things are become new." 2 Cor. v. 17. Living under the influence of the gospel, its doctrines supporting your faith, its precepts forming your temper and regulating your conduct, its promises animating your hopes, and its truths habitually filling your thoughts, and drawing forth your affections, you feel yourself as it were in a new world. Your life is unspeakably more happy than before. You have joys which "a stranger intermeddleth not with:" and your joy "no man taketh from you."

It will be henceforth the grand business of life to please God, and be wholly devoted to him; to maintain a constant reliance on the mediation of Jesus Christ; to seek after a greater resemblance to your heavenly Father in wisdom, in rectitude, in sanctity and in goodness; and to exert yourself, in order to

be useful to mankind in promoting their temporal, but especially their eternal happiness. The pleasures which result from spending your days in such a way, leave all others far behind: they are the purest and sweetest which are enjoyed on earth: but they are only the first fruits, and the pledge and earnest of still greater felicity. *Death* so justly dreaded by the greatest of infidels, is often invited by the disciples of Jesus as the messenger of their Father in heaven, to bring them home to their Father's house: and he will convey your soul into the presence of the God of love, and to the spirits of just men made perfect. At the *resurrection*, your body shall be raised from the grave: and placed on the right-hand of the Judge, you will with rapture hear him say, "Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom, prepared for you from the foundation of the world." An *eternity* succeeds of perfect holiness, and of the purest and constantly increasing felicity, in the society of all-wise and holy beings, and in the full fruition of the friendship of God. To bring you to the enjoyment of such happiness, is the design of *this Essay* in persuading you to become christians. That every unbeliever who reads it, may be made a partaker of these immortal joys, by receiving Jesus as the Saviour, is the author's fervent prayer; and would be deemed a glorious reward. If but *one* receive this benefit, he

will account his labour not lost, but well bestowed: for the happiness communicated to that one soul exceeds, with respect both to degree and duration, all the pleasure which ever has been, or ever will be enjoyed by all the men on the face of the earth, in every country, and in every age.

FINIS.

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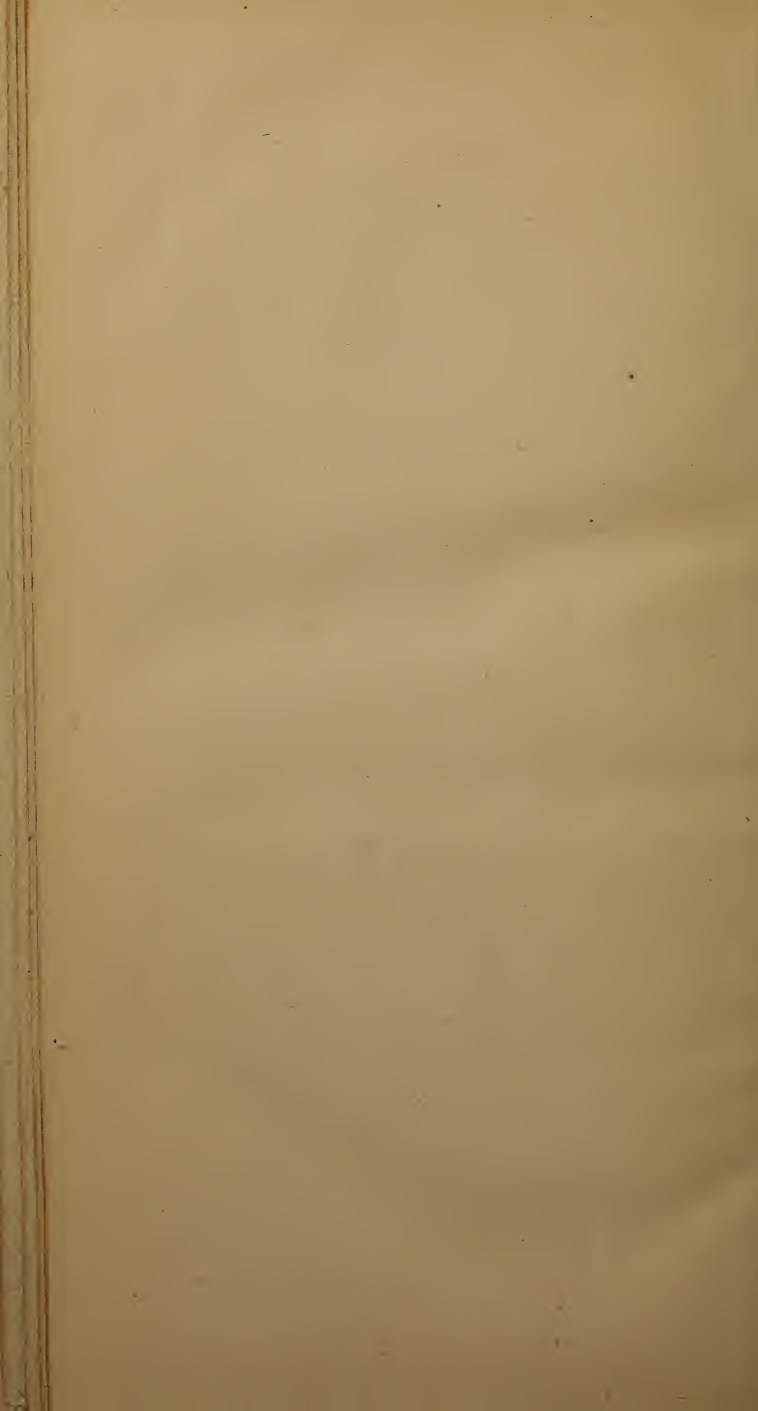
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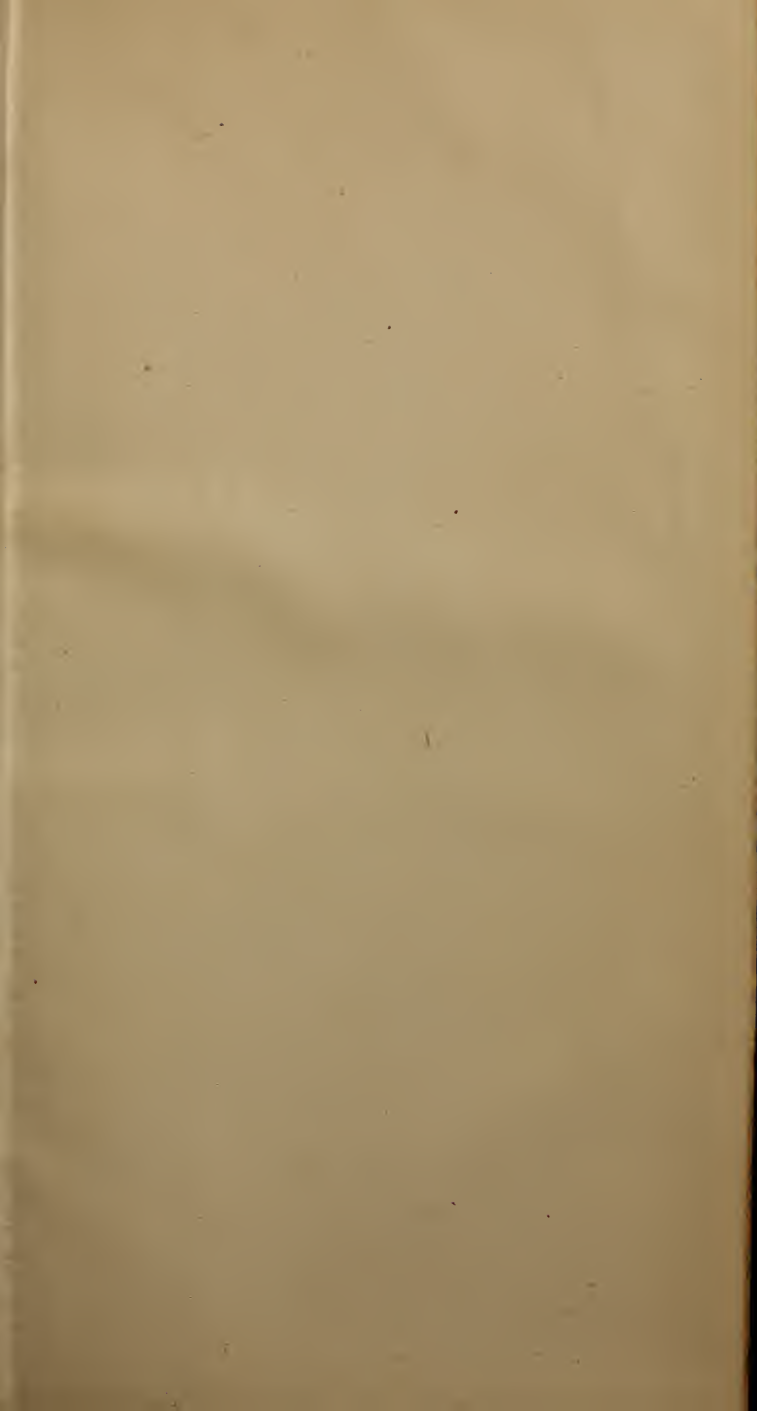
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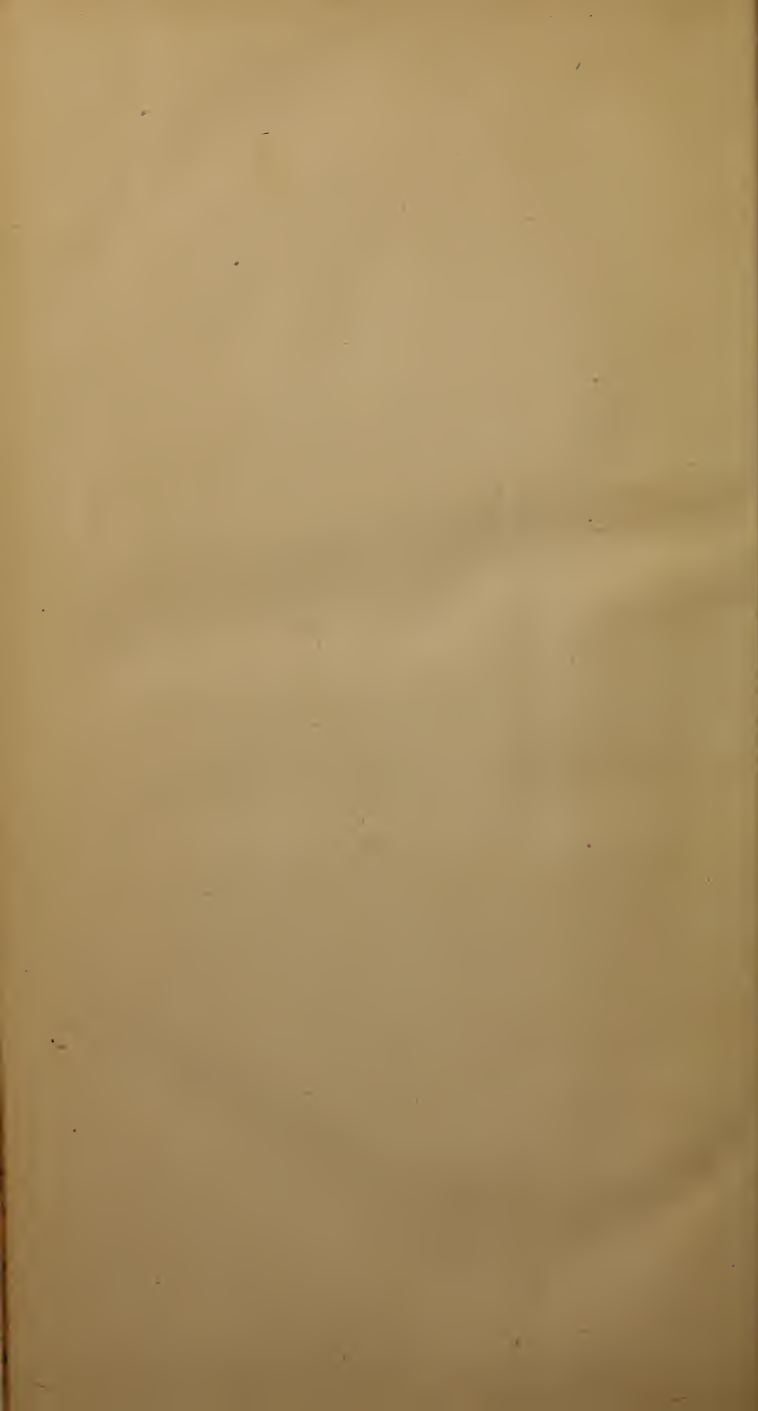
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